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EDMOND HAMILTON

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JACK WILLIAMSON

Prize Winning Editorial

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The Steam God

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Missionaries from the Sky

HARL VINCENT

Roadways of Mars

R. F. STARZL

The Glodoid Terror



Prize Winning Editorial

SCIENTIFCTION, SEARCHLIGHT OF SCIENCE

JACK WILLIAMSON

This prize winning editorial was originally published in 1928

SCIENCE ever widens our conception of the material universe. We drift farther from the old idea of man as the chief end of creation. To the savage, the universe is his valley, with the heavens arching low overhead, and himself, supreme. Science has found a million new worlds, and lost itself in them. Earth has become a cosmic mote; man, utterly ephemeral and insignificant. *Science* and *Intelligence* alone remain considerable quantities. Then, if the life of the earth is the briefest instant in Time, a question rises: Must man pass with the earth, or will *Human Intelligence* rule on, a new factor in the universe? The idea is stupendous. Science is the doorway to the future; scientifiction, the golden key.

The chief function of scientifiction is the creation of real pictures of new things, new ideas, and new machines. Scientifiction is the product of the human imagination, guided by the suggestion of science. It takes the basis of science, considers all the clues that science has to offer, and then adds a thing that is alien to science—imagination. It goes ahead and lights the way. And when science sees the things made real in the author's mind, it makes them real indeed. It deals only with that which it can see, or weigh, or measure; only with logical hypothesis, experiment and influence and calculation. Scientifiction begins with the ending of science.

The realization of scientifiction is proverbial. Science has made hardly a single step that scientifiction has not foretold. And science, in return, has disclosed a million new and startling facts, to serve as wings for the scientifiction author's brain.

Scientifiction takes a thousand accumulated facts and builds them into a real, impressive picture of ages past, whereby the future of the race may be foretold. It mounts a Time Machine and ventures through futurity, revealing the results of known conditions and tendencies.

Science knows that life on other worlds is possible, but it remains for scientifiction to make the vision real, and to suggest the space flier to verify it. Then science may build the flier, and see for itself. The boundless energy of the atom, the Fourth Dimension, the sub-universe below and the super-universe above, are scientific absurdities all, until scientifiction gives them reality.

And science goes on, with scientifiction as the searchlight. Here is the picture, if we can but see it. A universe ruled by the human mind. A new Golden Age of fair cities, of new laws and new machines, of human capabilities undreamed of, of a civilization that has conquered matter and Nature, distance and time, disease and death. A glorious picture of an empire that lies away past a million flaming suns until it reaches the black infinity of unknown space, and extends beyond. The picture is incredible to us now. Even in the light of scientifiction it is distorted and vague. The idea of the final product of evolution is beyond us. But a sublime picture is that scientifiction may build through the ages, and that science may realize for the ultimate advancement of man.

SCIENCE FICTION CLASSICS

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At once the fellow reached up and, to my surprise and horror, jerked off his close-cropped hair in one mass—a wig in fact. . .

SPACE-ROCKET MURDERS

EDMOND HAMILTON

Illustrated by LEO MOREY

ALWAYS the master story teller Edmond Hamilton penned this tour-de-force writing through the eyes of each of its major protagonists in turn! The theme?—the still exciting one of what would an alien culture do when it discovers another culture—a barbaric, cruel and destructive culture—balanced on the verge of discovering space-travel.

Chapter I

Letter of Dr. Ferdinand Melford, Chemistry Professor in the Philadelphia School of Science, to Arthur Melford, Instructor in Physics, Manhattan University, New York.

My Dear Nephew Arthur:

I am writing to you tonight under considerable stress of mind and I fear, indeed, that this letter will cause you to consider my mentality a little disordered. But I beg of you at the start to cast aside that thought and to read seriously what I have to tell you. A little incoherence is perhaps to be forgiven a man who writes under such a menacing shadow of death as now hangs over me.

I can see you asking yourself in surprise, "Death from what?" I wish I knew the answer to that question myself, but I do not. All I know is that across my path has come a sinister force or forces which I fear may even this very night bring about my— . . . but here, I will leave all this and tell you the facts.

You will remember, no doubt, that in the last ten months I have been engaged in all the time I could spare from my routine work in the School's

laboratories and lecture-halls, in a private research of my own, a study of rocket-fuels and a search for a fuel more efficient than any now available. As you know, I was interested in this field by Henri Mertraud, the late French rocket-experimenter, whom I met more than a year ago in Paris, when attending the International Chemical Convention.

M. Mertraud was kind enough to show me and Dr. Cyrus Hungerford, through whom I met him, some of his model and larger experimental rockets. He rather surprised me by the completeness of his laboratory, which included what he said was the best vacuum-tank for rocket-tests in the world. He gave me an interesting account of the work he had carried on in this field for six years, first in collaboration with Dr. Richard Braun of Berlin, and after Dr. Braun's death, alone. Mertraud and Dr. Braun, as you know, sent atmospheric rockets much higher in the stratosphere than any had ever done before, having greatly improved the designs of such pioneers as van Hijn and Morrow.

M. Mertaud was convinced, he told me, that rockets of his design or improvements of his design might with sufficiently powerful fuel attain a high enough velocity to escape entirely from the earth's attraction and travel through space to the moon or even, at the right time, to the planets of Mars or Venus. He even visualized the possibility of such rockets someday carrying human passengers and being capable of returning to earth. All this development would logically follow, Mertaud believed, upon the improvement of rocket-designs and the invention of lighter and more powerful fuels.

I was so interested by M. Mertaud's statements that I told him I would not mind spending some time in the study of rocket-fuels myself. Mertaud at once took up the suggestion, as he had understood from Dr. Hungerford that I was a chemist of standing, and the next day sent me a mass of literature on rocket-designs and fuels. In the days that followed, I had several talks with him on the problem, and when I left France, I assured M. Mertaud that as soon as I finished some special work on hand, I would devote myself to the rocket-fuel question.

I did so, a few months after my return, and eventually came to use most of my spare time on the problem. I soon found that the crux of the matter was to combine in a single fuel the necessary elements of lightness, power and quickness of firing. I will not give you the details of my work, but it is sufficient to say that I soon became convinced, as Mertaud and Braun had become, that powders were an unsatisfactory form for rocket-fuels, and that liq-

uefied gases offered a better approach than did ordinary liquid fuels. I was experimenting with combinations of liquid hydrogen with various other liquefied gases, when the news of M. Mertaud's unfortunate death reached me four months ago.

You may remember that Mertaud's laboratory burned down and that his charred body was found in it, he having been apparently trapped by the fire. It was supposed that some of the super-inflammable fuels he was testing in model rockets had taken fire, for it was recalled that his former collaborator in rocket-experiments, Dr. Richard Braun, had perished in a laboratory-fire of similar nature.

Of course I was shocked by Mertaud's death, but it did not make me think giving up my researches, as I had now become quite interested in the fuel problem. I had no thought whatever that his death was anything but the accident it appeared. But I will say at this point that *I am now quite certain that the deaths of Henri Meraud and of Dr. Richard Braun were not accidental.* You will understand shortly how I know this.

At the time, though, my only reaction was a sincere regret for M. Mertaud's unfortunate end, and I went steadily on with my rocket-fuel experiments. I cannot give all the details of my work except to say that in time I came to the conclusion that as a fuel-base, liquid hydrogen had drawbacks that outweighed its advantages, and I began to make tests of various combinations of liquid oxygen, alcohol and other substances.

Not long after this—about two

months ago—I entered into some correspondence with an American physicist who had taken up the problem of space-rocket design. This scientist, a Dr. Harris Winn of Detroit Scientific College, was interested in the possibility of designing small space-rockets capable of reaching the moon, and wrote me asking about some features of Mertaud's work. I answered, mentioning my study of rocket-fuels, and we continued to exchange letters on the subject.

Two weeks ago I published, in the May number of the *Journal of the Association for the Promotion of Science*, a short article summarizing the present status of space-rocket work, and mentioning, besides the earlier work of Braun and Mertaud and others, my own work with rocket-fuels and Dr. Winn's experiments. This was the first public announcement of my work, and you will soon see what consequences it brought in its wake. I fear, indeed, that its final consequence may be my death. But I am again, in my nervousness, outrunning my story, and must put things in their proper order.

Tonight, at about ten o'clock, five hours ago from the time I write this, I had a caller. As you know, I still live and have my private laboratory in the old Melford mansion and estate near the School, with only Barnett, my house-man, staying in the place here at night with me. I was in my study when I heard the bell ring, and in a moment Barnett brought in to me a card bearing the entirely unfamiliar name of "Mr Peter Nebo."

I told Barnett to show him in. Mr. Peter Nebo proved a rather unusual-

looking caller, a squat, stocky man dressed in good-quality clothes that fitted him rather badly. His black hair was close-cut and his face and hands were remarkably white and bloodless-looking, as though the man were just out of long confinement. He had un-prepossessing pale-green eyes.

As this Peter Nebo entered the room, I rose to meet him. But Man-nie, my little rat-terrier, who had been drowsing by my desk, sprang up before me and ran at my caller, barking furiously and showing his teeth in a diminutive snarl. I had Barnett take out the little dog, then showed Mr. Nebo a chair, and when he was seated, asked what I could do for him.

His pale-green eyes looked at me for a moment with a peculiar weighing expression before he spoke.

His voice was deep bass, unusually resonant, and he spoke in quite unaccented English.

"Dr. Melford," he said, "I've come on rather a strange errand, which has to do with your article on space-rocket work published recently in the magazine of the Association for the Promotion of Science."

"You're not a reporter getting a story on the topic, are you?" I asked. Certainly he did not look like one.

Nebo shook his head. "No, but I and some associates of mine are very much interested in that article. Especially in the part of it where you stated that your work with fuels might materially aid in the launching some day of space-rockets toward other planets. Was that correct?"

"It was, yes," I told him. "Of

course, all this work of mine is purely experimental, but, if more efficient fuels were devised, they would certainly advance tremendously the possibilities for successful space-rockets."

"And it is for fuels of such efficiency that you are searching?" pressed Peter Nebo. "I mean, you are working with the fuel-requirements of space-rockets directly in mind?"

"I am," I replied, "for such a fuel would have to be highly specialized. But just what is your interest in this, Mr. Nebo? You say you are not a reporter?"

"You will understand my interest," Nebo answered, "when I tell you that instead of your Association for the Promotion of Science I represent a lesser-known organization that might be called an Association for the Retardation of Science."

"Association for the Retardation of Science?" I repeated, puzzled. "Is this a joke or am I to understand that"

"Well, let us say for the retardation of a certain field of science," Peter Nebo amended. "That field, Dr. Melford, deals with the research of space-rocket improvement, which might someday lead to extraterrestrial travel and journeys to other planets. Our Association is unalterably opposed to such journeys ever being made by men."

"But why?" I asked. "Are your objections theological?"

"I am not at liberty to state fully the reasons for our stand," Nebo said smoothly. "But I will say that we are convinced that man will lose rather than gain by making contacts with other worlds in space, if that is ever

possible. We are, in a word, earth-isolationists."

"That is certainly an unusual viewpoint," I said. "But I fail to see just what connection this has with my work."

"The connection is apparent," said Peter Nebo. "You are, by your own admission, experimenting with fuels that might advance space-rocket design and thus greatly increase the possibility of travel to other worlds. Our society is determined to forestall such travel from ever taking place. We are, therefore, asking you to abandon your researches in this direction and to destroy all the results your work has already yielded you."

For a moment I was too much astounded by the cool effrontery of this request to make answer to it. Then I rose to my feet, indignation possessing me.

"Really, sir, I wonder that you can make such a proposition!" I said. "To ask a scientist to give up his researches because you have some vague objections to them!"

"You refuse to do so?" Nebo asked calmly. Somehow his calmness irritated me the more.

"Of course I refuse!" I exclaimed. "What made you think I would drop ten months' work at your request?"

The pale-green eyes of the man opposite me hardened as he rose. "It is not exactly a request," he told me. "It is more in the nature of a demand."

"A demand?" I cried, and he nodded.

"Yes, and a demand you would do well to heed, Dr. Melford. Our Association is not wholly without

power and we are prepared to use force if that is necessary to bring about our wishes."

"You threaten me, then?" I exclaimed, and Peter Nebo again calmly nodded.

"I do. Unless you quit the rocket-fuel researches immediately of your own will, we will use force to stop them. Will you agree to abandon this work?"

"Mr. Nebo," I said furiously, "I will give you one minute to leave this house. If you do not, I will call the police. I am only prevented from doing so now by my conviction that you are mentally unbalanced."

Peter Nebo looked at me for a moment in silence. "I am sorry that this is your answer, Dr. Melford," he said, and then walked out.

I was so angered for a few moments after he had left, that I was still rather of a mind to summon officers to apprehend the man. But after I had thought it over for a few minutes it seemed to me so evident that the fellow was at least partly insane, that my anger faded into irritation.

I was beginning work again on the notes that had engaged my attention before Nebo's interruption, when from out my subconscious memory came a vague something that startled me. It was a remembrance of something Henri Mertaud had said in the last letter he had written me before his death. As memory of what he had written grew clearer in my mind, I rose to my feet, my thoughts utterly overturned. Then hastening to my file, I began a rapid search in it for Mertaud's last letter.

When I found the letter, which

Mertaud had written to me the day before he perished in his laboratory fire, I ran quickly through it until I found the lines I wanted. I read them through and then, the hazy suspicions in my mind now crystalizing swiftly into a dreadful certainty I went back and read them again.

"This afternoon," Mertaud had written toward the end of his letter, "another crank called on me, one more original than most of those who bother me. Most of them, you know, are lack-witted people who hear of my space-rocket work and want to set sail with me immediately on a voyage to Neptune or Sirius.

"This individual, an odd-looking, squat, white-faced and green-eyed fellow, coolly told me that he represented an organization opposed to all space-rocket or other scientific work with interplanetary possibilities, and informed me that unless I ceased such work forthwith, it would be the worse for me very soon. I showed him the door without ceremony, as I was rather busy. I remember poor Braun wrote me not long before his death that someone with much the same idea had bothered him. Truly the curse of this work is the number of crazed and insincere persons it attracts to one!"

I stared for moments at those lines, my mind working. That odd-looking white-faced and green-eyed, squat person, who had warned Henri Mertaud, could only be the man I had just ejected, Peter Nebo. Nebo had demanded of Mertaud that he stop space-rocket research. Mertaud had refused, as anyone would—and within twenty-four hours Mertaud

had perished! That laboratory-fire that destroyed Mertaud and his work, was it accidental? Or was it the work of Nebo and his associates?

And what had Mertaud said . . . that Dr. Braun shortly before his death had mentioned someone who had told him to halt his rocket-researches. And Braun, with his work, was destroyed soon after that just as Mertaud was later! Was it Nebo and his associates, then, who had warned and destroyed in Braun's case also? Then Nebo's tale of his organization determined to stop space-rocket research at all costs, was the truth, and no mere figment of his mind!

It seemed and still seems to me that any group of men must be partly mad who would let their convictions on such an academic subject carry them to such lengths, but whatever the truth as to that, it was indisputable that these men were deliberately using murder when other means failed to stop all scientific research that might lead to interplanetary travels!

If this was so, I was in real and imminent danger. Nebo and his associates had warned me and I had flouted their warning. If the cases of Braun and Mertaud were any criterion, they would not allow me long to live. Most of my notes and formulae on the rocket-fuel experiments were in my private laboratory here in the house, as no doubt they knew. At any time they might try to destroy me and my work together as they had destroyed Braun and Mertaud.

Immediately I reached for the telephone and in a minute I had laid

the situation before the police department. Though somewhat skeptical at first, my account of the deaths of Braun and Mertaud, and of Nebo's presumed connection with them, changed their attitude, and they agreed that it was imperative that my house have protection for at least the next few nights.

So a little less than two hours ago there arrived one Police-Captain Crail with four officers. To Captain Crail I recounted the whole matter and he agreed that it was possible Nebo and his associates might try to fire the house to destroy me and my work, as they had apparently done with the German and French rocket-experimenters.

Captain Crail suggested that he and his men take up positions of hiding in the shrubbery around the house and grounds, and thus be able to apprehend Nebo and his companions if they approached the house. I agreed to the wisdom of this course and had Barnett show them to suitable places of hiding. I then returned to my study, only a little easier in mind.

That, as I say, was less than two hours ago. Crail and his men have been hiding out there during this time, but apparently no one has approached the house. At Crail's orders, one of the officers has come into the house each quarter-hour to make sure of my safety. As all this has made me too nervous to sleep or work, I have spent the intervening time in writing to you, my dear Arthur, this account of what has happened. My reason for so doing is that I want you to leave your classes at Manhattan University and come

down here to stay with me for the next few days.

I realize that I have no right to draw you into any danger that might threaten me, but I have no one else to turn to. The police will be watching, of course, but that is not like having a companion. You will perhaps feel surprised that I should experience such apprehension over the threats of this group of men, but this Nebo made so strong an impression on me, and the record of the two space-rocket experimenters dying shortly after his warnings is so close and sinister, that I cannot rid my mind of a certain foreboding.

Barnett is waiting now to take this letter out to mail, and Captain Crail's man has just come in again to see that we are all right. It is within a few hours of morning and I will be a great deal relieved, and perhaps less fearful, when day comes. But in the meantime, Arthur, I confess that you will make me feel much better, if on receiving this letter, you will wire me that you are coming.

Your affectionate uncle,
Ferdinand Melford.

Chapter II

Account of Arthur Melford

Professor Von Gersten, having asked me to draw up for our own consultation, an account of events from the time I received my uncle's letter until now, I am doing so with the aid of some details from Captain Crail and Lloyd, my close friend and superior at Manhattan University, Dr. Lloyd Jackson. I am afraid that this précis will hardly serve to explain the dark mystery that en-

meshes us, and that seems to grow darker and more terrible with the passing of time, but it may help.

Ten days ago I was living the more or less carefree life of a physics instructor in the New York institution where I've held a post for the last three years. My chief concerns were the dunning into a couple of hundred thick-headed sophomores the elementary facts of electricity and magnetism, and the equally tough and fruitless struggle to bring my golf score under a hundred. Then came my uncle's letter and swift-following on its heels—tragedy.

I received the letter of my uncle, Dr. Ferdinand Melford, early on the morning of June 2nd. I found it in my mail when I arrived that morning at Manhattan University for an early final-exam I was giving. As letters from uncle were rather infrequent, though our relations were of the friendliest, I opened and read it at once.

I was astounded! My uncle's account of the threats made against him by this Peter Nebo, whoever he might be, and of the strange deaths of the other two space-rocket experimenters, Braun and Mertaud, was startling. I did not wonder that uncle feared a like fate at the hands of Nebo and his group, whatever their motives. And when I showed the letter to my superior, Lloyd agreed with me that a real danger threatened Dr. Melford.

I was touched by my uncle's half-apologetic request that I stay with him for a few days. Certainly no one had a better right to make such a request, for Uncle Ferdinand had

taken the place of my dead parents in my boyhood and youth, had supervised my education and guided my choice of a career. More a father than an uncle, in my regard, I did not hesitate a moment in arranging to have a substitute give my classes their examinations for the next few days.

But before I left the university that morning, the tragedy came. It arrived in the form of a telegram for me, which I reproduce herewith.

Dr. Ferdinand Melford and servant killed shortly before morning in fire that destroyed house. Please come to Philadelphia immediately.

CRAIL, Police Department.

An hour later I was on a train speeding southward through the familiar New Jersey cities. And Lloyd was with me.

My dominating emotion was keen grief for my uncle. I had never realized how much the kindly, elderly scientist meant to me until I received that telegram. But before our train reached Philadelphia, I had set aside for the time my emotion, and was discussing with Lloyd the most important fact—the certainty that Dr. Melford had been murdered.

It was clear enough, in view of his letter of the night before. Nebo and his associates had carried out their threat and uncle and his laboratory had been destroyed just as had Mertaud and Braun. It seemed incredible that men could live who would commit a string of murders simply because of their objection to such an abstract field of science as space-rocket research.

It was indisputable that that had been the cause of uncle's death, though. There remained the question as to how he had met death while supposedly under police protection. I meant to investigate that problem, too.

When Lloyd and I debarked at the Broad Street Station that afternoon, we took a taxi and drove southward across the city to the suburb in which lies the Philadelphia School of Science. Not far from the campus the cab turned into the extensive wooded grounds of the old Melford estate.

The grounds of the old place looked the same, with their big oaks and beeches and dense, rather unkempt shrubbery, as when I had spent my boyhood there. But the rambling old frame mansion that had been the home of several generations of Melfords was reduced to a pile of debris in which several policemen and plain-clothesmen were searching.

One of the latter came over to Lloyd and me as we got out of our cab. He was a keen-faced man of middle age, whose expression had now a certain tenseness and haggardness.

"I'm Captain Crail," he told me. "You'll be young Mr. Melford?"

"Yes, and this is Dr. Jackson," I said. "My uncle's body. . . ."

"It and the servant's remains, what there is of them, have been removed to a mortuary," Captain Crail said.

"What about this Peter Nebo and his associates?" I demanded. "Have you caught them yet?"

Crail shook his head. "No, we haven't, though we've got a net

spread for Nebo over this whole end of the country."

"I understand that you and four of your men were watching the place at the time this happened," I said.

Captain Crail nodded, his face unhappy. "We were, and that's what makes me feel worst on the thing. Five of us here to protect Dr. Melford—and he and the servant killed in spite of us.

"But I'm not sure that five hundred men around the house would have saved your uncle. Whoever this Nebo and his pals may be, they fired the place in a way that we can't even guess yet.

"It happened at three in the morning, less than an hour after your uncle sent that letter to you. I and my four men were hiding in the shrubbery right around the house here, and no one could possibly have gotten within fifty feet of the place without being seen by us.

"To tell the truth, I didn't really think there was much danger threatening your uncle. From your uncle's account, I judged this Nebo as just another crank. Who but cranks would want to stop scientists from monkeying with rockets? But the thing was too serious to take chances on, in view of what your uncle told us about the German and French scientists who had been killed, so we were watching.

"I'd told Wilkes, one of my men, to go in every fifteen minutes and make sure your uncle was all right. Not that I had any idea anybody could get through us to the house, but I just didn't want to take any chances. From where I was hidden, I could see Wilkes go in each time, and

about two o'clock I saw Barnett come out and mail the letter your uncle had written to you.

"Barnett returned in a few minutes and everything was quiet. At three o'clock Wilkes went in as usual on the quarter-hour and he reports your uncle was writing in his study, with his dog beside him, and Barnett was sitting in the hall. Two minutes after Wilkes came out, it happened.

"The house simply exploded into flame! I never saw anything like it—one minute the house was a big darker bulk in the darkness, and the next it was a single sheet of flame roaring upward as though every particle in the place had taken fire at the same instant!

"We ran toward it but to enter that roaring furnace would have been suicide. Your uncle and the servant must have been dead immediately—we never even heard a cry from them. We ran around the grounds looking for anyone who might have started it, but there was no one! Not even a car was in sight, though one of my men, Janney, says he did hear a whirring noise as of a car speeding away.

"The place was burned down to ashes quicker than anything I ever saw before, even before the firemen got here. If it had been soaked in gasoline and filled with gunpowder it couldn't have burned faster—it was more an explosion of fire than burning.

"I had them get the radio-cars into this district and comb it for signs of Nebo or other suspicious-looking characters, but they found no one. Meanwhile Nebo's description was

sent out to all nearby cities on the teletypes, and that may get us some line on him yet. I sent cables also to the Berlin and Paris police for dope on the Braun and Mertaud deaths, and then wired you the news."

Captain Crail looked squarely at me. "Now, before anything else, Mr. Melford, I want you to tell me straight, whether you think I and my men were negligent in failing to prevent your uncle's death."

I shook my head slowly. "It seems that there is no way in which you could have prevented what happened," I said. "But what I want to know is, what *did* happen? How did Nebo's band fire the place so swiftly, and apparently invisibly?"

Crail spread his hands helplessly. "Mr. Melford, the thing's as much a mystery to us as it is to you. There seems no way to explain it, for I'll take oath they weren't on the grounds."

"Maybe they dropped an incendiary bomb from a low-flying airplane?" Lloyd suggested. "You said one of your men heard a whirring sound."

The police-captain shook his head. "They couldn't have done that, Dr. Jackson. It was the darkest kind of night last night and no plane, even at its slowest speed, could locate a house accurately enough for that. Also, a plane's motor is unmistakable, and we'd all have heard it. As it was, only Janney thought he heard a low whirring."

We looked at each other, then at the men still industriously delving in the ashes. The thing was baffling, the more so as I could see no rational motive for it all.

"It seems unbelievable that any men should feel so strongly on the subject of preventing travel to other planets that they'd kill two or three space-rocket experimenters simply to stop research along that line!" I exclaimed. "Nebo and his associates must have some other motive for these killings!"

"I'm not so sure," Captain Crail replied. "Madmen will do unpredictable things and I believe that Nebo and his companions, however many of them there may be, are all mad."

"Madmen who all have the same delusion?" I said skeptically. "Madmen who can execute crimes like these?"

"Yet madmen they are in my belief," Crail persisted. "Madmen whose crazed brains have somehow acquired the idea that for men ever to travel to other worlds would be unholy and forbidden, and who are deliberately murdering all workers on space-rocket and other experimenters who might further interplanetary travel."

"I've wired asylums here and abroad asking information on any patients released or escaped in the last ten years with delusions on that subject. I'm expecting an answer from them and also from the Berlin and Paris police on the Braun and Mertaud cases. We might go back in to town to headquarters and see what they answer."

We agreed to Captain Crail's suggestion, and after he had ordered his men to continue searching the ashes for possible clues, we drove in with him to the Police Department Building.

In Crail's little office, two lengthy cablegrams and some shorter messages were awaiting him, and he read them to Lloyd and me.

The cablegrams were from the Berlin and Paris police and gave the details of the deaths of Dr. Richard Braun and of Henri Mertaud. Dr. Braun's death had occurred two years before. He had a rocket workshop at the edge of a Berlin airport and it had been seen one night to burst suddenly into violent flames, destroying Braun and most of his work. The police-theory had been that some of his rocket-fuels had taken fire or exploded suddenly.

The same theory was held by the Parisian department in regard to Henry Mertaud's death four months back. Mertaud's field-laboratory had been outside Paris, but his model and testing-laboratory had been in the heart of Paris, a small two-story brick structure. It, too, had been seen at night to explode abruptly into fire and only the charred remnants of Mertaud's body had been found in it.

The shorter wires were from various asylums and bureaus replying that they had no record of any patients with delusions as to interplanetary travel having ever been released or escaped.

Captain Crail tossed the messages down upon his desk. "Which advances us not at all," he said. "We knew Nebo and his band killed Braun and Mertaud, and now we're sure they did it in the same way that they fired Dr. Melford's place, but that's all."

"No reports of Nebo's presence have come in from neighboring

cities?" Lloyd asked, and Crail shook his head.

"Not one. You'd think the man had vanished into thin air, and until we get him, we've no chance of laying hands on whatever associates he may have."

We three were staring rather helplessly at each other and night had fallen, when a card was brought in to Captain Crail.

"Professor Herman von Gersten, Berlin," read Crail. "What does he want?"

"He says it's about the death of Dr. Melford," said his assistant, and we all started a little.

"Send him in at once," Captain Crail directed.

Professor Herman von Gersten proved to be a thick-set man of middle age, with short curly blond hair, eyes, that were as keen as Crail's, behind his thick-lensed glasses, and a deceptively ingenuous face.

Crail greeted him and briefly introduced Lloyd and me. Von Gersten's eyes lit when Crail named me.

"So, the nephew of the unfortunate Dr. Melford!" he said. "That is good, that I meet you so soon."

"I understand you're here about Dr. Melford's murder—you've got something to tell us?" asked Captain Crail hopefully.

"On the contrary," answered von Gersten. "I am here investigating that murder, as I have been investigating, when time allowed me, for the last eight years."

"The last eight years?" Crail repeated. "Why, Dr. Melford was only killed last night."

"You misunderstand," the German informed him. "It is not Dr. Melford's death I have been investigating in these eight years, but the deaths of other men who have died as he died—and for the same reason!"

"You mean Mertaud and Braun?" I put in, and the Teuton turned quickly toward me.

"Ah, so already you know that Dr. Melford's death and those of Mertaud and Braun are connected?"

"We know, yes," I said, and would have continued, but Crail intervened.

"Just a moment, professor," he said. "I'd like first to know if you are an authorized investigator or police-agent."

For answer von Gersten drew from his breast-pocket a small blue card he handed to Crail with a bow.

"I hold a chair in the Berliner Polytechnik Institut," he said, "but have also a post in the Criminal Science Department of the Berlin police."

"Good enough," Captain Crail remarked as he handed the card back. "And you want us to tell you the details of Dr. Melford's death?"

"I do, yes," von Gersten said. "When you have told me, it may be that there are things that I can tell you. A fair exchange of information, not so?" He beamed upon the three of us.

"Well, the facts as to Dr. Melford are soon told," Captain Crail said gloomily. "If the newspapers had them, instead of thinking the thing accidental, as they do, they'd be headlining it."

He briefly recounted the facts and

von Gersten listened with utmost attention. When Crail had finished, the German's blue eyes were keen as sword-blades.

"It is as I feared," he said. "Had I landed in this country yesterday instead of today, I could have saved your uncle."

"You knew then that an attempt to murder him would be made?" Crail shot at him.

"I knew the possibility of that," von Gersten amended. "One week ago I read in the excellent Journal of the Association for the Promotion of Science an article by Dr. Melford on space-rocket work, mentioning his work with rocket-fuels and also the space-rocket experiments of a Dr. Winn of Detroit."

"I saw that article and I went straight and bought a ticket for America on the next boat. I landed in New York today, intending to go to Philadelphia to Dr. Melford. But in the newspaper I read an article describing Dr. Melford's death in a fire that had his house destroyed. I knew then that they—those whom you call Nebo and his associates—had struck even sooner than I had expected."

"You were going then to warn Dr. Melford that Nebo and the rest would be after him?" Crail asked.

Von Gersten bowed. "Yes, for I knew that so soon as they learned of the rocket-researches of Dr. Melford and also of Dr. Winn they would act to stop them. And I had a plan as to that."

"But who is this devil, Nebo?" I interrupted. "You must know that, if you know so much about this."

The German looked gravely at me.

"Yet I do not know that, Mr. Melford. Who is Nebo? How many associates has he? Where is his home or base? I know no more than you.

"But I have followed the work of this man and his companions for eight years, and do know something. I know that Nebo, who has used the names of Smart, Wladolowski, Cametto and others indiscriminately, and his associates, have murdered at least eleven scientific experimenters in these eight years!"

"Eleven!" I exclaimed. "Eleven scientists cold-bloodedly wiped out by this madman and his band?"

"I am not so sure, myself, that he is a madman," von Gersten said. "But I will tell you briefly of Nebo's record.

"You have heard of Willem van Hijnn, the Dutch engineer who was the pioneer in space-rocket research. He who sent small rockets higher into the stratosphere than any before him had ever done? Well, van Hijnn died eight years ago, as perhaps you remember. And he died as Dr. Melford died—in a fire that swept his workshop!

"Van Hijnn was a friend of mine, and I was in Amsterdam at his funeral. I suspected nothing, any more than anyone else, until I came across a diary he had left in his bedroom at home. In it, two days before he died, van Hijnn had recorded how a man named Wladolowski, a strange-looking man with unnaturally white face and green eyes, had called on him and warned him he must stop his work with space-rockets. Nebo, of course, under a different name.

"Naturally, van Hijnn had refused—and two days later he was destroyed. That aroused my suspicions. Yet try as I might, I could get no further trace of the so-called Wladolowski. I forgot the occurrence until two years later, when the Englishman, Felix Morrow, perished. Morrow was a London author who had taken up and gone on with van Hijnn's space-rocket experiments, because of his intense interest in the possibility of traveling to the moon or to some planet.

"Morrow had a Thames-side workshop with a trained technical assistant and had made a hobby of his space-rocket models. His workshop, too, puffed into flame one night—always at night, mark!—and he and his assistant were burned to death. I read of that and would have thought nothing of it, had not the newspaper mentioned the efforts of the London police to trace an odd-looking, green-eyed man who had had some sort of altercation with Morrow the night before the fire.

"At once I remembered the case of van Hijnn. Was this, then, the man who had had the argument with Morrow, the Wladolowski who had threatened van Hijnn? I went to London to investigate, and I learned that this time the green Eyed man had given his name as Smart. After leaving Morrow's place, he had been seen to join three companions a little along the street.

"This meant that my Wladolowski or Smart was not working alone but had associates. How many of them he had, or has, I cannot guess. By that time I was convinced that Morrow and his assistant were murdered

to stop them from continuing their space-rocket research, just as van Hijn had been. This must mean a group of madmen was at large, so strongly infected with the delusion that space-travel was unholy that they would kill to prevent it from ever being brought about.

"The next space-rocket experimenter to meet death was Krasny of Budapest, eight months later. Then over a year afterward, two Japanese scientists who had advanced a scheme for firing a projectile to another world from a huge cannon sunk into the earth's crust, were slain in their Tokyo laboratory. In both cases, that of Krasny and of Oyumi and Shota, a visit from a caller easily identifiable as your Nebo or my Wladolowski had preceded their deaths, and in both cases the experimenters perished by fire.

"In the years since then, six more scientists were destroyed. Dr. William Hayes, the Australian scientist who was at work on a new kind of successive-firing rocket, was next. As usual, his death was by fire, though in his case I could not trace any call by Nebo beforehand. I am sure that such a call took place, however, as these murderers seem punctilious in warning their victims and giving them a chance to stop their research.

"After Hayes, followed the death of Serge Wilsoff, of the Soviet's Moscow laboratories. Wilsoff had been trying to devise rockets for passenger-traffic over oceans, and had turned to consideration of the launching of one into space. Quickly came the warning to stop such research. Then, when the warning was

disregarded, came death by fire. Very shortly after, L. Molokoff, who took up Wilsoff's work, met the same fate. And in the last two years have followed the similar deaths of Dr. Braun, of Henri Mertaud and now of Dr. Melford.

"In each case," von Gersten's eyes were glittering as he drove home his point—"in each case the murder was done by firing the laboratory, workshop or home of the scientist in question. In my opinion that is done so the man and his work would perish together. In no case was the method of firing discoverable, but every time it happened during the night.

"Also, in each case, the scientist was given a chance to stop his work. Nebo, under one name or another, called on them and warned them that all research leading toward space-travel must halt. All of the eleven disregarded this warning, and all have died.

"I might have been able to save some of them by warning them, but in no case have I had time. For in every instance, the warning and the murder took place almost directly after it had become publicly known that the scientist in question was engaged in space-rocket research. Evidently Nebo and his companions constantly scan scientific journals and newspapers and miss no such news, and evidently they act at once on learning of it."

Von Gersten leaned back, spread his hands. "There you have the story," he said simply. "Eleven experimenters slain by this Nebo and his band—a remorseless, relentless group who have determined ap-

parently that space-travel never shall take place. And a group who have eluded all efforts at discovery!"

Crail and Lloyd and I had listened to von Gersten intently and with deepening perplexity.

"By God, it's unbelievable!" Captain Crail exclaimed. "A bunch of lunatics running down eleven scientists like that!"

"But are they lunatics?" Lloyd asked. "Professor van Gersten, can these men really have no other motive for this list of murders than a common delusion?"

The German shook his head slowly. "Many times I have asked myself that question," he admitted. "Sometimes it seems to me that only the craziest of lunatics would such murders commit. And at other times I seem to sense behind these crimes some great mystery whose edge we do not even approach."

"Well, whatever is the motive of Nebo's group, it's up to us to catch them," said Captain Crail. "Have you any idea as to how that could be done?"

Von Gersten's head bobbed. "I do have an idea, one that brought me to America," he said. "I meant to try it with Dr. Melford, but it is not too late—we can try it with the Doctor Winn, the other rocket-experimenter Dr. Melford mentioned in his magazine-article.

"My idea was this, that Nebo's group would sooner or later approach Dr. Melford when they learned of his space-rocket work, and warn him to stop it, as they have always given warning. I meant to persuade Dr. Melford to have men ready at all times with him to seize

this Nebo or whatever name he might give, when he came to give his warning.

"It is too late, as I say to carry out that plan with Dr. Melford. But we can do it with Dr. Winn. Sooner or later, Nebo and his associates will warn Dr. Winn as they did Dr. Melford, to stop the space-rocket work. We will get Dr. Winn to keep about him out of sight, policemen who will seize Nebo when he calls upon him!"

"That's a real idea, professor!" exclaimed Captain Crail, his eyes kindling. "I never thought of it, but it'll give us a real chance of getting Nebo, and once we have him, we can soon get the rest of them!"

"But hadn't you better communicate with Dr. Winn at once about it?" Lloyd asked. "There's no telling how soon your Nebo might visit him, now that Dr. Melford is disposed of."

"That's right," Crail said. "I'll get Dr. Winn on the phone now—once he agrees to the plan we can go up there to Detroit and be waiting with him when Nebo shows up."

He grasped the telephone and in a few minutes the connection to Detroit had been put through. The Detroit Central reported that Dr. Winn's home had informed her that the scientist was this night in his laboratory in one of the buildings of Detroit Scientific College, and that she would connect us with him there.

In a few moments more, in fact, a thin and somewhat impatient voice was audible from the receiver Captain Crail held.

"This is Dr. Harris Winn," it stated. "What is it?" "Dr. Winn, this

is the Philadelphia Police Department, Captain Crail speaking," said Crail. "You read of Dr. Melford's death?"

"Yes, yes—a sad accident," answered Winn. "Melford was a brilliant man. But what are you calling me about?"

"We are certain that Dr. Melford's death was not an accident," Crail told him swiftly. "We believe that the murderer, or one of them, may call on you sometime soon and we want to arrange that he be detained if he does so."

"The murderer of Dr. Melford call on me? Why in the world should he?"

"Dr. Melford was murdered by a group of madmen or fanatics of some sort who are bitterly opposed to all scientific research into space-rockets, which might lead to space travel," Crail explained. "Their leader, who named himself Peter Nebo, warned Dr. Melford shortly before his murder to stop such research, and we believe Nebo may give you a similar warning."

"But I've already had a warning of that sort—this very afternoon!" replied Dr. Winn.

We jumped to our feet. "You have?" cried Crail. "Who gave it to you—what happened?"

"It was a man who called himself Walter Ennis," replied Dr. Winn, "a short, stocky person."

"Did he have an unusually pallid face and green eyes?" cried Crail.

"Yes, that describes him exactly. He told me some fol-de-rol about an organization opposed to space-rocket experimentation and demanded that I stop my researches. I showed him the door."

"Dr. Winn, that was Peter Nebo—the head of the group that killed Dr. Melford and almost a dozen other scientists in the same line of research!" cried Captain Crail.

"Tell him to at once leave his laboratory; to hide in another part of town!" exclaimed von Gersten, his blue eyes blazing. "He is in most deadly danger!"

"Get out of your laboratory, out of the building!" Crail told the scientist on the other end of the wire. "At any moment Nebo's group may carry out their threat and destroy you as they did Melford and the rest!"

"But I don't understand . . ." we heard Dr. Winn start to say when he broke off suddenly. Then from the receiver in his voice came a high scream that mingled with a loud roaring sound. "My God, it's . . ."

"What is it?" yelled Crail into the transmitter. "What's happening?"

The receiver was silent as the grave. Crail jabbed the hook fiercely as von Gersten and Lloyd and I pressed tensely to him. "Operator!" shouted Crail. "What's the matter with that line?"

"I don't know, it just went dead," replied the Detroit operator's voice. "Just a moment, please, and I'll find out what's the matter."

In a silence of utter suspense we four waited in the little Philadelphia office, our minds all at the Detroit end of the wire. It was not one moment but many before we heard the Detroit operator's voice again, this time excited.

"Your line went dead in a fire!" she reported. "The building of Detroit Scientific College, in which your connection was, is reported as

having burst into flames and is already half-destroyed, they say."

"What about our party, what about About Dr. Winn?" cried Captain Crail.

"There's a report that there were only two men in the building—a professor and a janitor—and that the fire was so sudden that neither escaped!" the operator answered. "If you'll hold the line, I'll get the names for you"

But Captain Crail set the telephone down on the desk softly and turned to us. His face was very white. "This time too, Professor von Gersten," he said, "you have been just a little too late. Dr. Winn is dead."

Von Gersten's eyes now were cold, steely. "The twelfth man dead at the hands of Nebo's gang, yes," he nodded. "And the only chance we had of capturing Nebo—gone!"

Chapter III

Account of Captain James Crail

Being a policeman and not a writing man, I didn't want at all to draw up this recountal of the events in this case that followed the murder of Dr. Winn. But the others, young Melford and Professor von Gersten and Dr. Jackson, having insisted that I was best fitted to do so, I am taking it on. There'll be no more literary polish in it, though, than in any police report.

I'll admit that I was rather knocked off my feet on that night of June 2nd when we four in my office heard of the destruction of Dr. Winn and his laboratory in the Detroit College. It had never occurred to me that Nebo and his pals might strike again so quickly after their murder of Dr.

Melford, and I felt a certain responsibility for not having warned Dr. Winn.

Also, I still felt responsible more or less for the murder of Dr. Melford. Of course, as Arthur Melford had agreed, Nebo's band must have used some unheard-of way to fire Dr. Melford's house, and a hundred policemen around it would apparently have done no more than we did, to prevent it. But just the same, no policeman who is called on for protection, likes to see the man he's protecting murdered under his nose, and that's what had happened to Dr. Melford.

It made me determined to get this lunatic Nebo and whatever nuts might be trailing with him, if it took me ten years. That began to look like more of a job when this von Gersten appeared and told us of the number of space-rocket experimenters and scientists that Nebo's group had killed in the last eight years. But the idea of nabbing him through Dr. Winn brightened things up for me.

The destruction of Dr. Winn, that took place literally within our hearing, though he was in Detroit and we in Philadelphia, blasted our hopes in that direction.

The first news given us by the Detroit operator was soon supplemented by the Detroit police.

According to them, the building at Detroit Scientific College, in which Dr. Winn was, had simply puffed into flame from top to bottom. Winn and the other man in it, the janitor, had no chance to escape.

No cars had been seen leaving the place during or after the fire, and no one had reported seeing a man of the description of Peter Nebo. The

Detroit police promised to get a drag-net out for him at my request, but I had small hopes of their success.

When I finished talking to them, I looked at the others. Young Melford and Dr. Jackson were rather white but Professor von Gersten seemed more keenly disappointed than shaken.

"Gone—the chance to catch that demon!" he exclaimed. "Had Dr. Winn known sooner, he could have had men there to seize Nebo when he visited him this afternoon!"

"There's no use going over what might have been," I told him. "The thing to do is to get on the trail of Nebo and the rest before they spring any more of these murders."

Von Gersten shook his head. "My friend, there will be no more murders in the immediate future," he assured me. "For the simple reason that Melford and Winn were the only outstanding space-rocket experimenters, and that until new experimenters take up the problems of interplanetary travel and attract the attention of these madmen, they will have no cause to act.

"But when we next hear of such scientists taking up space-rocket research, we will not delay. We will surround them with men who can seize whichever of Nebo's group appears to warn them. And once we have some of them, if only one, we can search out the others."

"Then that's what you're going to do—wait until other scientists take up space-rocket work and use them to trap Nebo?" Arthur Melford asked. Von Gersten nodded.

"It is all that can be done. It may mean a long wait, but sooner or

later the chance will come, and then we will maybe end once and for all this organization of mad murderers."

I stared at the three of them. "Say, you three may be swell scientists, but I'll say you'd make poor cops!" I said. "To talk about waiting, maybe for years, until some other scientists take up the rocket-research!"

"What else is there to do?" Arthur Melford asked.

"Do?" I repeated. "Didn't you ever hear of the gentle art of framing? Don't you suppose that Nebo and his fellow-nuts can be framed as well as any gangster or gunman?"

"Frame Nebo?" said Melford. His face lit up. "I think I see what you mean! You mean to get some scientist to give out that he is seriously engaged in space-rocket experiments, and that that will . . ."

"Will come to the attention of Nebo and his associates and they'll think it's straight," I finished for them. "And when they call on the scientist in question to give him their usual polite warning about stopping his experiments, before bumping him off, they'll run into a bunch of hidden men they won't have a chance in the world to get away from!"

"It is superb!" cried von Gersten. "Captain Crail, I congratulate you—this will mean their capture!"

"Well, save the congratulations until we're in the clear," I told him. "The first thing to do is to fix it up for some scientist to publish a lot of stuff about his important space-rocket experiments. It ought to be a scientist of first-class standing, too, so that

Nebo and his gang won't suspect camouflage."

"You'll find it rather hard to get a scientist of standing to put out such a story," predicted Dr. Jackson. "Scientists are so jealous of their scientific reputations that most of them would refuse to take a chance of impairing their standing by issuing untrue statements."

I grinned at him. "I know that, but I know one scientist of first-rate standing who'll do it, I think. His name's Dr. Lloyd Jackson."

"I?" said Jackson startled. "You want me to announce I've been experimenting with space-rockets, then?"

"Yes, I do," I said. "You've got enough scientific position to make Nebo's group believe your statements. They'll come to warn you before trying anything—they always have—and as I said, we'll be ready night and day to grab them when they come."

Dr. Jackson reflected for a moment. "All right, I'll do it," he answered.

"Thanks, Lloyd," said Arthur Melford gratefully. "I'll be there to take any chances you have to take."

"We all will," I agreed. "Now, what statements are you going to issue? They ought to be strong enough to make Nebo and the rest sure to come, you know."

"If you will permit a suggestion," said von Gersten keenly, "why not say that you have developed a method of producing atomic power, immense power from the controlled disintegration of atoms, and that you intend to use it first in a space-rocket to reach the nearer planets?"

Arthur Melford nodded quickly. "That would bring Nebo and the rest, if anything would! For that would mean, if it were true, an immense scientific step forward in the possibility of interplanetary travel."

Dr. Jackson made a wry face. "It'll mean my scientific reputation going to shreds, too, when I announce it," he said. "Atomic power! But I'm with you on it."

"Good!" I said. "Now I suggest that you return to New York immediately, Dr. Jackson, and about two days from now make that announcement to the newspapers. It ought to get publicity enough."

"We'll be up there with you from the time you announce that, Dr. In the meantime, I'll arrange to get leave here and to take a couple of my own men with me, and Mr. Melford can carry out his uncle's funeral ceremonies, as I suppose he wants to do."

"I believe all of us, including Professor von Gersten, should be careful not to be seen with you after the announcements are made, lest Nebo and his pals become suspicious. So we'll join you just before you give out your statements and stay with you, hidden, until Nebo shows up."

"You have some sort of private laboratory at Manhattan University, I suppose?" I added.

Dr. Jackson nodded. "Yes, a fair-sized one on the top-floor of the Building of Physical Science."

"Well, you can, in your statements, let drop the fact that your model space-rockets and atomic power formulae and all that are in your private laboratory, and that you're working there night and day."

In that way Nebo will know where to find you. And the rest of us can lie hidden there and when he shows up we'll grab him, if we have to kill him to do it."

These were the arrangements which, after a little more discussion, we adopted. Dr. Jackson returned to New York that night.

Von Gersten and Arthur Melford remained in Philadelphia with me and on the next day, June 3rd, was held the funeral of the remains of Dr. Melford and his servant. Both von Gersten and I attended with young Melford.

On the morning of the 4th we three left for New York, with us being three of my men, Wilkes, Janney and McCloskey. The chief had allowed them and me indefinite leave for the time the case required. No doubt the New York police would have cooperated to the extent of furnishing a couple of men, but to ask them, meant giving out the whole story of what was still, to the newspapers, only a couple of accidental fires.

We reached New York before noon and went straight out to Manhattan University, on the northern heights of the island. The big place had rather a deserted look as the regular school-year was ended and summer-school had not yet begun.

Young Melford led us to the Building of Physical Science, a big square gray-stone building at the campus' western edge. We went in and up to the private laboratory of Dr. Jackson, where he was awaiting us.

There was a small office at one end of the laboratory and it was

there that we meant to watch and wait, in shifts, after the announcements were made, for the appearance of Nebo's group. Jackson had placed a couple of cots and some tinned foods in this office, as our wait might extend for days.

After I had pronounced it all satisfactory, and we had settled down in the office, Dr. Jackson telephoned the four leading New York newspapers and said he had some important news to give out. They appreciated Jackson's standing and promised to send out reporters at once. In fact, four reporters and a photographer appeared in less than an hour. Dr. Jackson received them in the laboratory, but we had opened the office-door a crack and could see from our hiding-place in the office as he gave out his statement.

I was afraid that Dr. Jackson's natural repugnance to giving out untrue statements might make him play his part badly but he rose to the occasion. In an impressive way he told them that he had solved the secret of producing power from the disintegration of atoms, and that he meant to use this atomic power in a new-design of space-rocket that he was going to build.

The reporters were much excited. "Could you give some sort of demonstration, Dr. Jackson?" one pleaded. "This is going to create a great sensation."

"I fully intend to give a demonstration of my discovery," Jackson told them, "but to demonstrate this atomic power on other than a minute scale, I will have to arrange a field-laboratory in some less thickly-inhabited region than this. The

forces released by this process are too powerful to take chances with."

"But, doctor, why are you applying your discovery to the construction of space rockets, instead of to more ordinary purposes?" asked another. "Atomic power will revolutionize the world if it is applied to industry."

"I know that," said Dr. Jackson seriously, "But I consider the space-rocket question, the possibility of bringing about travel to other worlds, of the greatest importance. I mean to use this atomic power I have developed in this way first."

There were other questions from reporters, shot at Jackson so rapidly that he could hardly answer them. He promised a demonstration of the atomic power within a few weeks—as soon as he had devised an easier-controlled apparatus. He also told them that he was working every day and most of the night at the task of designing an atomic-powered space-rocket.

They left, obviously anxious to return with their stories, and Jackson came back to the office where we were hidden.

"You heard that bunch of pseudo-science I handed them?" he said. "At least it ought to make a great newspaper-story."

Arthur Melford laughed. "It will, Lloyd. I can hear now some of the comments your scientific confrères will be making when they read of your wonderful discovery."

"Yes, I know about what they'll call me," said Jackson ruefully. "But you think it'll bring Nebo?"

"It certainly should," declared von Gersten. "If they hunted down those

other scientists simply because they were experimenting with space-rockets, they will certainly come here when they hear you have discovered a source of atomic power to use in such a rocket."

"They'll come," I agreed, "and when they do come, we've got to be ready. From now on at least two of us will always be awake and watching, and we all have our guns. When Nebo and his pals do show up, they won't get away."

There began then a strange wait. I decided that four of us, in two shifts of two, were enough to wait in the office off the laboratory, and so I had two of the men, Janney and McCloskey, post themselves at the front and rear entrances, respectively, of the building's ground floor. To the caretaker in charge of the unused building, Jackson explained that these were men he had hired to protect him from curiosity-seekers.

The other four of us, von Gersten, Arthur Melford, Wilkes and I, remained in the little office. We were all armed, and as two of us would always be watching the laboratory where Jackson was, all would be ready for Nebo's welcome.

The New York newspapers on the night of June 4th gave considerable front-page space to the startling announcement Jackson had made to the reporters. We read the articles that night, Jackson having had the caretaker bring in copies of all the papers.

Dr. Jackson's statement, sensational enough by itself, was made even more sensational by the newspapers' treatment. They enlarged on

what his discovery of atomic power would mean, if it proved to be all he stated. Electricity and steam as sources of power would be scrapped, a handful of coal could run a steamship around the world, and the like. And even more wonderful, Dr. Jackson meant to use atomic power first in launching a rocket into space toward other worlds.

The writers here drew highly imaginative pictures of Jackson's atomic rocket touring the worlds of the solar system, of possible inhabitants on such planets as Mars or Venus, of a future line of atomic rockets plying between the various planets and earth, it being presumed that terrestrial colonies would soon be established on the planets that proved habitable. All this would result from Dr. Jackson's discovery.

The scientists, who had been asked for their comments, were of different opinions. Some said it was quite possible that Dr. Jackson had devised a way of obtaining atomic power but that the idea of making its first use the actuating of a space-rocket was unsound. Others stated outright that they did not believe the alleged discovery. Most of those who were asked rather hedged on the question. Generally, though, there was an air of disbelief among the savants.

But the public, or at least a great portion of it, seemed to believe. For there began that very night an influx of curiosity-seekers, cranks, reporters and inventors, that lasted for the next four days. They streamed up into the laboratory to question and bother Dr. Jackson, and he had perforce to let them all be admitted,

since we could not tell when among them might come Nebo and his associates.

In those four days we continued the most monotonous of existences, two of us in the little office keeping watch on the laboratory and Jackson while the other two slept. It was not so monotonous for Jackson himself, because, confined by our plot to the laboratory, he occupied himself in work of his own, that I suppose his visitors thought was part of the space-rocket and atomic-power researches. In those four days he did not leave the laboratory.

On the fifth day, his stream of visitors had slackened a good deal, for the first sensation caused by Jackson's statements had by then faded out a little. We remained constantly on the watch. It was my belief that by this time Nebo's group would certainly have read of Dr. Jackson's wide-heralded discovery and plans, and that they would not delay long in putting in an appearance.

On the evening of the fifth day, we ate together a somewhat sketchy dinner, and then Dr. Jackson went back into the laboratory to continue his work, while von Gersten and I kept watch. It was Wilkes' and young Melford's turn to sleep. Von Gersten and I sat close together, near the crack of the just-opened door, within full view of the brightly-lit laboratory, where Jackson puttered with his flames and test-tubes.

It was a little bit before midnight that there sounded a knock at the laboratory's outer door. Jackson went to open it and I saw two men step quickly inside. Immediately I sensed that these were not ordinary

visitors, for they had not been announced by the caretaker in charge below. And as they stepped into the lighted laboratory's full illumination, I saw that the end of our wait was at hand.

The foremost of the two men was Peter Nebo! I needed but one glance at his squat figure, dressed in a good-quality dark suit, his close-cut black hair, unnaturally dead-white face and hands and green eyes, to identify him.

And his companion might have been his twin brother, for this other man also stocky, dark-haired, white-faced and green-eyed! I rose to my feet, eyeing Nebo tensely through the crack in the door, and with my gun out in my hand. Von Gersten too had seen, and with eyes gleaming behind his glasses had risen, gun in hand.

I saw that Dr. Jackson also recognized his callers but he betrayed no sign of any prior knowledge.

"You are Dr. Lloyd Jackson?" asked Peter Nebo politely. "My name is Clark and I and my brother wish to see Dr. Jackson."

Jackson nodded. "What is it you want, gentlemen?" he asked calmly. "I am Dr. Jackson."

"We wished to learn, Dr. Jackson," said Nebo, "if it is true as the newspapers stated, that you have discovered a method of producing practical atomic power, and intend to utilize it to propel a space-rocket?"

"Yes, the newspaper accounts were substantially correct," Jackson told him. "I have been successful in developing such power and mean to use it first in that way."

In the next moment, things hap-

pened with bewildering rapidity. I had been ready to burst out into the laboratory with von Gersten and confront and capture Nebo and his companion. I had fully expected that he would go on to warn Dr. Jackson that he must halt his space-rocket research, as he had done in the other cases.

Instead, Peter Nebo uttered a quick cry in some unknown tongue, and at the same moment he and his companion grasped Dr. Jackson and hastened with him to the laboratory door! They were abducting Jackson instead of warning him!

Instantly von Gersten and I burst out, and I shot swiftly at Nebo's companion. He dropped with a guttural cry, but as he did so, a half-dozen squat, white-faced men rushed into the laboratory from the hall in answer to Nebo's shout!

Four of them grasped Jackson, and with Nebo, dragged him out of the laboratory, while the other two delayed a moment to aim flat metal rods in their hands toward us. From the rods sprang thin jets of clear liquid, and though these jets missed von Gersten and me, where they struck against the laboratory's wall, the wall burst suddenly into flame!

As the two ran out, von Gersten and I shot, but missed them in the smoke and flame pouring from the laboratory's wall. I heard the tread of running feet ascending the hall stairs that led to the roof! Wilkes and Arthur Melford burst from the office, awakened by the uproar, pistols in their hands, and Janney and McCloskey came running up from below.

"McCloskey—Janney—get an ex-

tinguisher and put that fire out before it spreads!" I yelled. "The rest come on with me!"

I ran into the hall and up the stairs. Melford and von Gersten beside me and Wilkes following. "What's happened?" young Melford was shouting.

"Nebo and his gang—they took Jackson up to the roof!"

As we raced up the stairs, we heard a whirring sound, quickly dying away above. We burst out on the roof and even in the darkness it took but an instant to see it was empty!

Arthur Melford yelled and pointed westward. There against the glow of the lights along the Hudson, we saw momentarily a slim speeding shape of gleaming silver that vanished even as we saw it.

"They've got away with Lloyd!" Melford cried. "They had a plane on this roof and have escaped in it!"

"A plane?" I exclaimed. "Then that's how they got into the building, coming down from the roof! But how did they ever land and take off a plane on this small roof?"

"God knows, but they did it somehow!" Melford said.

McCloskey and Janney emerged on the roof, grimy and panting. "We got the fire out," they reported. "Did they get away with Dr. Jackson?"

"They did," I said. "But why did they carry Jackson away instead of warning him to stop research, as they did all the other scientists? Has Nebo taken him off to kill him?"

"No, I think not!" von Gersten interposed. "Tell me, you saw that companion of Nebo's you killed, and those half-dozen other Nebo called to

his aid? You saw that they looked alike?"

"They all looked like Nebo himself, if that's what you mean," I told him. "Squat, white-faced, green-eyed—but what about it?"

"I think it means much, that," von Gersten declared. "I think it may explain all this mystery that for eight years has puzzled me. Quick, we will go down and examine that one you shot and whose body they left where it dropped."

We went back to the laboratory, which was badly burned but was no longer burning. The body of Nebo's companion lay by the door where it had fallen and we all knelt beside it.

Seen so closely, the man was very strange-looking. His green eyes stared up sightlessly at the ceiling, a round hole above one eye showing where my bullet had gone. His face and hands retained their unnatural dead-whiteness.

Von Gersten rummaged in the pockets of the man's clothing. He drew out several objects we inspected. One of them was a flat metal rod with a trigger-like catch at one end, plainly one of the weapons that released the jets of liquid, which had fired what matter they had touched.

Another object we turned over and over was an intricate little cylindrical mechanism of wires and diaphragms none of us could fathom. The other thing in the man's pockets was an oblong silvery metal plate several inches long, on whose surface was engraved in black an accurate Mercator's projection of the earth's surface.

Superimposed on this map were a

number of curving lines that glowed with light as though marked by radium-paint. These lines all radiated from a single point in eastern Labrador, to some ten or twelve points distributed over the earth's surface. Along each line was an inscription in characters absolutely unfamiliar in appearance to all of us.

"What does this earth-map mean?" I asked. "Can you make anything of it?"

"I can make something of it, yes," von Gersten said in a tone of repressed excitement. "But I make more of this man himself than of what he carried in his pockets—see!"

We all gasped. Von Gersten had grasped the dead man's close-cut black hair and had suddenly pulled the whole mass of it off! The black hair was a wig, and its removal disclosed a moist-looking green-skinned head. And this bulbous green head was soft, von Gersten's pressing thumb sinking into it an inch!

Our bewilderment and horror deepened when the German pulled off the dead man's clothing and we saw that all his body except his face and hands was covered with moist green skin also. Closer examination showed that the whiteness of the face and hands was due to a coat of white skin-paint having been applied to them, for when a little of this was scraped away, the green skin showed beneath.

This green-skinned body was quite inhuman in general characteristics. There seemed no skeleton in it at all, it having been supported instead by immensely thick-grouped muscles. The legs and arms, in fact,

were nothing more nor less than great tentacles that tapered down at their extremities to semi-human fingers and toes.

With hands that trembled a little, von Gersten pointed out that the ears were quite different in inner-structure from anything human and that the teeth in the mouth were artificial ones, apparently inserted to allow the reproduction of human speech-tones.

"I have no doubt," von Gersten said, "that dissection of this body will reveal that it is entirely boneless, and that the circulatory, digestive and nervous systems will be found radically different from the human."

He stood up, the metal world-map with its glowing lines in his hand. We rose unsteadily also. "But then what is this—this thing?" I asked shakenly. "It's not only like nothing human, it's like nothing ever known on Earth!"

"You are right there, Captain Crail," von Gersten said, almost calmly. "Although it seems to have developed a near-human form, the species to which this thing belongs, cannot have developed under terrestrial conditions."

"You mean that this thing and the rest, that Nebo and the others are . . ."

"I mean that Nebo and his associates cannot be creatures of Earth at all. They are creatures of some other world."

Chapter IV

Account of Dr. Lloyd Jackson

In preparing this account of my capture and what followed, I have

made painstaking efforts to adhere scrupulously to fact, even in the smallest details. The importance of so doing is obvious, when it is realized, as it now is, that my capture at the hands of Nebo and his followers and what came after constitutes the first conscious contact between the inhabitants of earth and inhabitants of another world, between humans and intelligent non-humans.

That night, when I opened the door of my laboratory to the two callers who had knocked on it, I had, of course, no suspicion of the astounding truth. But I did know that I was facing Peter Nebo and one of his associates. The descriptions left no doubt—this squat man with black hair, unnaturally white face and green eyes could be no other than the ring-leader of the group that had killed a dozen space-rocket experimenters. The other was so much the same in appearance, that I accepted Nebo's ready explanation that it was his brother.

When I admitted, in answer to their first question, that I had discovered a source of atomic power and meant to use it in a space-rocket, I fully expected to hear Nebo warn me to stop such research, as he had warned Dr. Melford and all the others. I knew that Captain Crail and Professor von Gersten must be watching from the office at the laboratory's end, and before Nebo finished his warning, they and the others would burst out and seize the two.

But to my utter surprise, no sooner had I made that admission, than Nebo and the other had grasped me and were rushing with

me toward the door. I heard a cry from Captain Crail and a shot, and Nebo's companion loosed me and sank to the floor. But Nebo continued to hold me with a strength which then seemed to me superhuman, and in answer to his shout, a half-dozen figures like him poured in from the hall.

Four of these grasped me also and I was lifted and carried out of the laboratory with a swiftness and strength I could not resist. I heard cries from Captain Crail and von Gersten, and heard too the sudden crackle of flames as I was borne up the stairs toward the roof. With Nebo urging his followers to greater swiftness in deep cries in an unknown language, we burst out onto the roof.

In the darkness, I was just able to see that I was being borne toward a long, torpedo-like metal craft that rested on the roof. I kicked and struggled, but was like a child in the hand of my captors. They hurried me to a round open door in the metal hull's side, leapt in with me, and then as the last two to reach the roof sprang in, there was a whirring sound from the craft's bottom and stern, and through a small window in the door I saw the roof dropping away, as we darted into the night.

Nebo uttered a brief command and those holding me abruptly released me. I looked dazedly around.

The interior of the craft was undivided, so that I stood near the center of a sort of hollow metal submarine forty feet long. It was brightly lit inside and there were several small windows.

The craft's interior was rather

crowded by unfamiliar-looking mechanisms and objects, but in my first scrutiny, I was more intent upon the occupants.

A few feet from me stood Peter Nebo, his coolly unemotional green eyes regarding me from his dead-white face.

Around me stood the half-dozen men who had helped him carry me off. With a creeping of the skin, I now discovered that all of them were replicas of Nebo in appearance, green-eyed, white-skinned, black-haired and squat-bodied. All were watching me incuriously.

Two other men, exactly like the rest, sat in the nose of the craft at a control-board covered with rods and small wheels.

I became aware that Peter Nebo was speaking. He spoke briefly in an unknown language to the men about me. At his orders all but two of them went to other parts of the craft; those two holding flat metal rods that were obviously weapons of some nature, remaining to guard me.

Nebo then spoke to me in English. "Do not be alarmed, Dr. Jackson," he said to me calmly. "We have no intention whatever of harming you."

"Why have you kidnaped me?" I asked, rather unsteadily. "Who are you—where are you taking me?"

"To answer those questions may take rather more time than you think," he said. "I will content myself for the present by saying that we have seized you in this fashion for weighty reasons."

I was beginning to recover a little from my dazedness. "The same reasons that induced you to kill a dozen other scientists, I suppose?" I shot at him.

There was a little surprise in the green eyes. "You know that we killed them?"

"Yes, I know that you've murdered a dozen space-rocket experimenters from van Hijn to Melford. Why have you killed all these experimenters so ruthlessly?"

Nebo considered me for a minute with an unfathomable expression. "These things I will explain to you shortly, Dr. Jackson," he said. "In the meantime, be assured that no harm will come to you from us."

He turned from me and went to the nose of the craft. I saw him speak to the two men at the controls, and they answered.

Then they shifted rods and turned wheels and I felt the racing craft turn sharply in mid-air.

I half-raised myself to look through the little window beside me. Far, far below in the darkness, I made out two little beds of lights that I knew must be cities.

They sped backward so quickly that I knew the craft was traveling at incredible speed, though the only sound was the ceaseless whirring of its operation and a thin whine of winds outside.

Looking upward at the stars, I soon discovered that we were traveling almost due north. It was evident that the craft had first flown westward and then, after having left New York well behind, had now changed course and headed north.

I looked about in an effort to discover the source of this strange craft's power. Ranged along its walls were big cylindrical tanks, and from these, heavy tubing or piping ran to the nose and stern of the craft and also to its floor. From the tubes that

ran to the stern and the floor came the soft whirring. It was evidently these that in some way were hurling the torpedo-like hull through the air. There were connections between all the tubes and the control-board in the nose.

I also made out some smaller square tanks connected to metal nozzles that were mounted just inside the windows like so many machine-guns.

Nebo came back from the craft's nose and saw me staring about. "You are wondering how this flier operates?" he asked. "Those cylindrical tanks hold certain explosive gases compressed thousands of times.

"These gases are released through those tubes from openings outside the flier's hull, being fired at the moment they are released. Their firing-recoil is of tremendous force, and the firing of the bottom or floor-tubes raises and suspends the flier in air.

"Firing of the stern-tubes propels us forward, and similarly the nose-tubes can be used for braking purposes."

I nodded. It was in my mind to learn from Nebo as much as possible concerning this whole business.

"What about those other tanks and nozzles?" I asked, pointing to the square tanks with their gun-mounted nozzles.

"Those," Nebo explained, "are tanks of liquid so chemically compounded that almost any kind of non-metallic matter it touches bursts into flame. We use it by projecting it from those nozzles, and also have the small hand-rod containers of it."

Light broke in upon me with his words. "Then that's how you fired

the laboratory-building of Dr. Winn, and Dr. Melford's house and all the rest!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, we simply brought the flier, on a dark night, over the building we wanted to destroy. Hovering a little above it in the darkness, we had only to turn a few streams of the firing-liquid down on the building below and instantly it went up in flames."

"And that's how you did it!" I repeated. "I thought of an airplane, but an airplane couldn't have hovered and would have been heard, so . . ." Here I broke off.

I continued. "But *why* did you do it?" I demanded. "Why kill those dozen scientists and why carry me away?"

"Dr. Jackson, every one of those scientists we destroyed was working on experiments that might help to bring about interplanetary travel," said Peter Nebo simply.

"We destroyed them, after they refused to stop their work, because we are utterly opposed to such travel taking place. We will never, while we can prevent it, permit the development of space-rockets or anything else that will allow men to journey to other planets."

"But what's your reason for being so dead set against men reaching other planets?" I exclaimed. "We thought you were madmen, with a delusion on the subject, but madmen couldn't have designed this flier and these other things. You must have some reason."

"We have a reason, Dr. Jackson," answered Peter Nebo gravely. "and that reason is that we ourselves are from another planet and that our race is determined that men of Earth shall never invade our world."

I stared at him. For a moment, my first reaction to his astounding statement was that after all these men were all mad. But the very craft in which I was being hurtled smoothly through the upper night, the very unfamiliarity of all the things about me, beat down this idea and supported, incredible as it was, Nebo's assertion.

"I know that it will be hard for you to understand and believe," Nebo was going on, "but it is quite true. I and all my companions are natives of the planet that you call Venus."

"You mean to tell me, then, that you came to earth from Venus?" I said hoarsely. "In this flier?"

"Not in this flier," Peter Nebo corrected. "This is but one of the craft we use on Venus and which we brought, with several others, for use here on earth."

"The ship that brought us here from our world is many times the size of this one and quite different, though it operates on the same principle of gas-firing recoil as this little flier."

"It's unbelievable!" I said unsteadily. "You can't be from another world—you, men like myself!"

"We are not men like yourself, Dr. Jackson," said Nebo quietly. "We are not men at all."

"Look, and be assured for yourself," he added, and turning, gave a brief command to one of the men guarding me.

At once the fellow reached up and to my surprise and horror jerked off his close black hair in one mass, a wig in fact, and disclosed a green-skinned soft head like that of a seal.

He quickly then doffed his clothing. I cannot express the horror

that was mine, when I saw that his body also was green-skinned and seal-like, a soft boneless trunk from which branched arms and legs that were in effect huge feelers or tentacles like those of an octopus, instead of ordinary human limbs.

I saw then that the face and hands were white-painted, accounting for their unchanging dead-whiteness. I saw also that the only parts of this grotesque and unhuman body that looked human at all were the hands and fingers, the face with its nose and mouth and ears, and the eyes—the parts of the body covered by ordinary clothing being totally different from the human.

The thing reassumed its clothing at Nebo's order. Shaken, sick, I stared at Nebo himself. "Then all of you are like—like that—" I struggled with the words.

"Yes, I am the same and so are all these others," Peter Nebo answered.

"My God, creatures wholly inhuman!" I exclaimed.

"But creatures which, I think you will have to admit, equal and surpass you humans in intelligence," Nebo told me calmly.

"But you passed as humans—you talk our languages—" I said, unable still to understand.

"We did, because it was necessary to fulfill our work here on your world," he said.

"But what is your work? The killing of scientist's here?"

"Our work," Peter Nebo said gravely, "is the prevention of any scientific research on the part of you humans which might lead to your attaining power to visit our world.

"That is why we have killed the space-rocket inventors and other ex-

perimenters and that is why we have carried you off like this, Dr. Jackson. To understand fully our motive, you must understand something of our history."

His voice was very serious and thoughtful, and as his pale green eyes looked calmly into mine and his deep voice talked, I could not realize that this was a non-human creature of another world.

As he spoke, I sat half-crouching on the floor, listening with a terrible tenseness. The whirring of the firing tubes never stopped as the flier drove unceasingly northward through the upper night. Except for Nebo and my two guards, the others in the craft were on watch at either the controls or mechanisms.

"Our world, the world that you have named Venus," said Peter Nebo (I could still think of him only by the human name), "is a world very much unlike yours in some respects. It is of much the same size as your earth and like it, has a day of about twenty-four earth-hours.

"Also, like Earth, Venus has an atmosphere with the vital substances of carbon dioxide and oxygen present in it, though in somewhat different proportions. But the surface of our world differs very much from the surface of this one.

"Venus has no moon. At first that fact may not seem important to you, but it has made a great difference between the two worlds. When earth was semi-molten, it flung off a great mass of its matter that became its moon. That caused irregularities of height in the surface of the earth, so that when its seas formed, they ran into the deeper basins and formed

oceans, while the higher areas formed continents of dry land.

"On Venus, on the contrary, no moon having been flung forth, there have never been such irregularities of level. For that reason, when our seas condensed from the primeval hydrosphere of our planet, they covered almost the whole planet, a few small islands alone remaining uncovered. Thus, our world is predominantly a watery world.

"Because of that, evolution on Venus has followed a somewhat different course than on Earth. Here life originated in the seas and there developed its first crude forms. But very soon in its history, life moved to the land, where it began the development of a multiplicity of land-forms. After ages of such land-development, one class of the vertebrates, the mammals, proved most successful, and after still more ages of variation and selection, one species of those mammals, man, developed the real intelligence, which has made wonderful progress.

"But on Venus, the story of evolution was entirely different. There the great part of the history of life was enacted in the waters and only comparatively late in its history was the land invaded by any life. For there the land-masses were small and unpromising, and the seas were endless and bountiful. In our world, life had developed to a comparatively high level and had produced a species of creatures of some intelligence *before* any living thing ventured on the land. That species of which I speak was ancestral to my own species.

"Back in those times of our earliest development in the Venerian

seas, there was little vertebrate development, conditions being different than those of your terrestrial seas. The chief development in so far as intelligence and activity were concerned was among a class of creatures akin to the cephalopods, the octopods and squid of Earth.

"These creatures were four-armed, capable of quick motion through the waters and had considerable enterprise and strength. They advanced rapidly in these things until they dominated the seas and outmastered all competing creatures. Their instincts widened into consciousness and intelligence, dim at first but slowly growing.

"They were water-breathing creatures, special organs in their bodies extracting the dissolved air from the waters, but they were able also to live for some time in the air and to breathe air. Their ability to breathe air soon enabled them to spend all their time on the land. They consciously desired to invade the land and gradually they did. It was a deliberate conquest of land much different from the instinctive invasion of land made long ago by your ancestral forms of life on earth.

"Once on land, the capabilities of these creatures rapidly expanded. They learned to walk on two of their tentacle-limbs and to use the other two as arms for manipulation purposes, carrying their heads or brain-cases erect above their bodies. They quickly learned the use of tools and built structures, dwellings—a progress that would have been impossible had they remained in the waters.

"Soon their numbers crowded the

islands that were the only land of Venus, and their structures had so increased as to form cities. They had designed vehicles and mechanisms by then, and weapons, and their scientific knowledge grew continually as the scientific spirit took hold.

"Two thousand years ago, while humans were still mostly barbaric and knew nothing of science, our race had reached a fairly civilized state. We were slowly becoming conscious of the real scheme of the universe, of the admirability of truth. We were, and have been ever since, just a little ahead of you in scientific progress.

"Our speculations as to what lay outside the unchanging cloud-screen that is our planet's sky, were unending. At last, eight hundred years ago, we developed an astronomical science which made it possible for us to look through the cloud-screen by using telescopic and photographic instruments sensitive to infra-red rays that can pass through the clouds.

"That is how we came to see the sun and the other worlds of the solar system and the stars. Gradually there arose a desire among us to visit the nearer of the other worlds. The planet nearer the sun than us, that you call Mercury, was plainly uninhabitable. But the next one, Earth, looked habitable to us and much we desired to visit it.

"So began experiments in space travel that continued for a long time. Innumerable projectiles and rockets were designed and launched, but none were successful. At last, two hundred years ago, a ship, designed

on the rocket-recoil principle, proved workable. And when Venus and Earth were in inferior conjunction, that ship made its first successful trip.

"That first Venerian ship reached earth in what you would call the first part of the eighteenth century. But the Venerians, before landing openly on Earth, carefully reconnoitered its surface without themselves being seen, so that they might be sure there was no danger.

"It was well for Venus that they did so. For they saw that Earth held a race of intelligence and knowledge of science almost as great as the Venerians', and a race whose millions far outnumbered ours. They saw that this race of man had devised the most destructive weapons of which their science was capable and that with these weapons they fought unceasingly among themselves, striving to subdue each other and slaying each other in hosts.

"This was enough to give the Venerian explorers pause. What would happen, they asked themselves, if they landed among these races of men and told them they came from Venus? Would these fierce, hostile hordes not see at once in Venus new lands to conquer? Would they not attempt to duplicate the Venerians' ship and travel across the void to attack the Venerians?

"It might take them a long time to duplicate the Venerians' feat of space-travel, but they could undoubtedly succeed eventually. Once they had knowledge of that other world, and the possibility of reaching it, these restless beings

would not halt until they had done so. And would that contact between humans and Venerians not inevitably mean bloody combat?

"With these things in mind, the first Venerian explorers did not make their presence known to the men of earth. Instead they headed back to Venus, and the people of Earth never even suspected their visit. When they reached Venus, they made detailed report to the Venerian leaders of what they had seen.

"Their report was given much attention. It was finally decided that the Venerians should never let the men of earth know of their existence, for, though our science was greater than that of the humans, though we could no doubt repel them if they tried to attack us, yet there were thousands of them to every Venerian and it might mean unceasing attempts on their part to invade our world. No, we would never let them dream of our existence!

"It was recognized, though, that with increasing scientific ability, the humans of earth might before long try to devise space-ships of their own.

"If they did so, they would duplicate our feat and reach Venus. They would find our crowded Venerian cities on our little islands and would take news of them back to earth.

"We decided, therefore, that we must do all in our power to prevent the earth-peoples from ever developing a method of space-travel. To do this, we would have to keep some Venerians always on earth as spies or agents acting for us.

"Since such spies must look as much as possible like humans, to pass when necessary as such on earth, a group of Venerians were altered surgically to enhance a human resemblance. The tentacle-ends of their arms were made into human hands and fingers, the ends of their leg-tentacles were made capable of wearing human shoes; their faces were somewhat remodelled to approach the human; artificial teeth placed in their mouths and alterations of their vocal cords enabled them to produce the sounds of human speech; and wigs to simulate human hair were provided and their green faces and hands were whitened.

"This group then headed for Earth as passengers in one of the space-ships we had built. Their first care was to establish a base on earth where they would not be discovered by humans, and they did establish such a base in the uninhabited stretches of what you call Eastern Labrador. There they built shelters for themselves and the supplies they brought, building also a landing-frame-work for the greater safety of the space-ship. Then the space-ship returned to Venus, leaving the Venerian spies in their base.

"These Venerians had several of the small fliers we of Venus use for transport between our various islands. In these they ventured out, flying always by night, and explored Earth. They found parts of it still very savage and other parts civilized. They captured humans and took them back to their base, forcing them to teach them the various

earth-languages. Of course when they had learned all they could from these captives, they were forced to kill them, although we Venerians abhor bloodshed ordinarily, still we could not let a few lives weigh against the good of an entire race.

"These Venerian spies kept their watch over Earth. They procured and read its journals and newspapers and made sure that no attempts at space-travel were being considered by humans.

"In a few years Venus and earth were again fairly close to each other in space and across from Venus to this world came a Venerian space-ship with relief for our spies—other Venerians, who would take their place.

"When these new arrivals had received sufficient information and training, the others, or the greater part of them, went back to Venus in the ship. And the new arrivals continued the watch upon mankind.

"And so it has been in all of the two hundred years that have passed since then. Unsuspected by all of you humans, there has always been a group of Venerians in our base, who, disguised as humans, were able to keep posted on the progress of human science.

"Every few years they were replaced by others from Venus who volunteered for this duty.

"In all this time, until about twenty years ago, there was little work for our spies. Although he has progressed rapidly in scientific knowledge, man has been concentrating upon extending his power on earth without thinking of leaving it. He

has devised railroads and steamships, electrical power and radio and airplanes, but he has almost ignored the possibility of visiting other planets.

"But about a quarter of a century ago, our spies brought back to Venus word that men were beginning to speculate on the possibility of interplanetary travel. It was little more than speculation, romancing, but it was significant of what might come. So our spies on earth were ordered to prevent at all costs any real development in space-travel research.

"The first case in which our Venerian spies took action occurred eight years ago. Until that time, there was only empty speculation about space travel, and not much of that, but eight years ago, our spies learned that Willem van Hijnn, a Dutch engineer, had become convinced that a space-rocket could be designed, which would reach other planets, and he was working on designs.

"Our Venerian spies, with their superior knowledge of science, knew van Hijnn's rocket-designs to be unworkable, but nevertheless his researches on the subject could not be allowed to proceed. So, not wanting ever to take life, save when there was no other course, they visited van Hijnn in disguise and warned him to stop his work. He refused, never dreaming, of course, of their true identity.

"So our spies were forced to kill van Hijnn and to destroy his work. They did so quite simply by bringing their flier over his laboratory by night and turning on the building a stream of our chemical fire-fluid,

which causes any non-metallic combustible substance it touches to burst into flame. Van Hijnn and his work were destroyed.

"In the same way the others were warned. Each one refused to heed the warning. They were all destroyed. Morrow, and Krasney, and the two Japanese, these space-rocket experimenters perished in the next few years in the same way as had van Hijnn and for the same reason.

"Three years ago, when the relief-ship came from Venus, I came with it to earth, to take my place as head of the Venerian spies here. You seem to think that it was I who was responsible for the killing of van Hijnn and those other earlier experimenters, but that is only because we Venerians all look alike to you in this disguise. I was never on Earth until three years ago.

"In these three years, I have done my part for Venus. Dr. Hayes, the Australian rocket-worker, was the first scientist I had to destroy. Then Wilsoff, and Molokoff, then Dr. Braun and Mertaud, and finally Dr. Melford and Dr. Winn. For the sake of my race, my world, I have led in the destruction of these scientists who might have brought nearer interplanetary travel for men. It is now almost time for the relief-ship to arrive and take me and my companions back to Venus, but others will arrive to take our place. As long as we have spies on Earth, no progress toward space-travel will ever be made by men!"

As Peter Nebo's serious, quiet voice stopped, I stared into the Venerian's calm green eyes with my brain whirling.

During all this conversation, the flier continued to whirr on softly at tremendous speed, northward through the night. The other Venerians remained on watch at controls and mechanisms, but so fascinated had I been by what I had heard that I was unconscious of my surroundings.

One paramount question burst up from the chaos of my thoughts.

"But if you warned and then killed all those space-rocket experimenters to prevent the furtherance of interplanetary travel, why didn't you kill me?" I asked. "Why did you carry me away?"

"Those other scientists," Nebo explained, "were all experimenting with space-rockets and fuels which, while they might in time bring about space-travel, were far inferior to our own design of space-ships. We destroyed them simply to prevent men from progressing in any way toward space-travel, as I have already said.

"But you, Dr. Jackson, in discovering a method of producing unlimited atomic power, have gone further than our Venerian scientists. Often have our scientists tried to produce atomic power and failed. When we learned that you have had solved the secret, we had no desire to kill you and destroy your work. We wanted, instead, to take this secret of yours to our scientists."

"You mean that you carried me away because you want to get my secret of atomic power from me?" I cried. Peter Nebo answered in the affirmative.

"Yes, for by so doing, we advance our own scientific powers and space-travel possibilities immensely. At

the same time, we prevent your secret from ever becoming known to humans."

I stared at him and then I began to laugh—raggedly, weakly, hysterically. Nebo stared at me and the other Venerians in the speeding flier to gaze at me too.

"The joke is on you in that case, Nebo!" I cried. "There is no secret of atomic power—I never discovered it at all!"

"That cannot be so, Dr. Jackson," Nebo said calmly. "In the newspapers of the last few days there have been long accounts of your discovery of atomic power and your intention to use it in a space-traveling rocket."

"But those accounts were lies!" I shouted. "They were concocted deliberately by young Melford and Crail and von Gersten and me and published to draw you and your band to me so that we could trap you!"

Nebo's expression did not change. "I quite understand why you should say so," he told me. "Naturally you do not want this secret of atomic power to fall into the hands of another race, another world."

"But I'm telling you the truth!" I said desperately. "The whole thing was merely published to lay a trap for you and your associates. That's why my friends were at hand when you appeared!"

"Your friends would naturally be guarding you when you had such a secret," the Venerian remarked. "I am afraid there is no use pretending that you do not have it."

I stared helplessly at him. "You'll find out otherwise when you try to

get such a secret out of me," I told him.

"I will not try at all," he answered. "I will leave that to the scientists of Venus."

A cold sweat seemed suddenly to break out on my forehead. "Of Venus?" I repeated. "Do you mean you're going to take me . . ."

"You will be taken to Venus, yes," he said. "The Venerian relief-ship will arrive at our base in the next two days and when it returns with us to Venus, you go too."

"Once on Venus, our scientists can no doubt extract from you information regarding your method of producing atomic power. You will not be harmed unless you make it necessary, and, though you will, of course, never see earth again, your experience may not be unpleasant."

The prospect opened by his words was so appalling, that for a moment I was left speechless. A random thought struck me.

"They'll know—my friends will know you're from some other world when they find and examine the body of the Venerian shot in the laboratory!" I exclaimed.

"No, for two of my followers fired the laboratory as we left," Nebo said. "That will destroy any formulae as to your discovery that you may have left, and will also destroy the body of our companion."

I did not know, could not know at that time, that two of Crail's men had managed to bring that fire under control, any more than the Venerians suspected it. I felt caught in some nightmare, from which presently I surely must wake.

Nebo left me and went to the nose

of the flier again. I saw him conferring with the two Venerians at its controls, no doubt on the course being followed.

I remained in a sort of dream as the flier whirled on through the night. The events that had snatched me from my New York laboratory and presently would transport me across a great gulf of space to another world seemed incredible, impossible.

Looking now and again from the window, I could see only darkness beneath, and from this absence of lights I judged that the flier was already hurtling over the sparsely-inhabited wastes of northern Quebec toward Eastern Labrador. Also, the stars were paling eastward to announce the imminence of dawn.

When the sickly gray light of day began to appear in the east, it dimly disclosed a barren, treeless, gray plain far below. Over these steppes that were wholly without sign of human beings, the flier was moving at dizzying speed.

But even as the day grew, the flier was beginning to slacken speed and to decrease its altitude. I saw Nebo and the other Venerians gazing from the windows ahead and guessed that we were nearing their base.

There came into sight on the gray plain ahead what looked like a small circle. As the flier rushed on and down toward it, I saw that it was a circular embankment of earth, perhaps fifty feet high and a thousand in diameter.

Inside it, was a row of neat metal buildings of no great size, except for three or four that looked like storehouses.

This row of buildings was at one side of the circle and at the other was a huge and curious structure. It was a metal framework built up from massive girders, something like an amphitheatre or hollow hemisphere in shape, as though made to receive a huge ball. It was at least two hundred feet across.

The flier headed down toward the row of buildings. I saw two other fliers resting on the ground beside the houses, and a number of figures running out of the buildings as we descended.

Our craft slanted down, hovered motionless a few yards over the ground whirring softly, then sank vertically until it rested on the earth. At once one of the Venerians threw open the door, and a wave of cooler air poured in.

Nebo spoke to my two Venerian guards and then to me. "Please go with us without making trouble, Dr. Jackson. It will be better for you if you do."

"Where are you going to take me?" I asked.

"Just to one of the buildings where we must confine you until the relief ship comes," he said.

"All right, then," I answered, after a moment's hesitation.

I stepped out of the flier to the ground. Around me, besides Nebo and my two guards, crowded a score or more of figures.

They were Venerians like those I had already seen, disguised like Nebo and the others by human-clothing, whitened hands and faces and the black wigs. I could not tell one from another—they looked so much the same.

Nebo and the guards led me toward one of the smaller metal buildings. I noticed that the guards kept their rods ready for use at all times.

The door was opened and I stepped into the little building. It was about twelve feet square and had no windows—being used formerly as a minor store-room by the Venerians, I supposed.

"Food will be brought you shortly, Dr. Jackson," Nebo told me before the door was closed. "We have no food such as you humans consume, but I think you can shift with ours."

"When, exactly, do you expect your ship from Venus to come?" I asked him.

"It should be here day after tomorrow if all has been well with it," he said. "You will know as soon as it arrives, for always it stays just long enough to disembark the Venerians it brings and take on those returning to Venus. It does not stay longer, lest there should be some chance discovery by humans of its coming."

"But you can't really expect to take me back on it?" I exclaimed. "Not to another world, when I've told you that I have no process of producing the atomic power?"

The Venerian's strange face was expressionless. "I have no choice in the matter," he said. "I have my duty to my race and my world."

With that, he left me. I inspected the interior of my prison for some time in the hope that there might be some method of escape from it, but soon found there was none.

Within a half-hour the door opened and I was handed a shallow metal platter of dark red mushy substance,

and a metal bottle or flask of liquid, which proved to be pure water. I ate a little of the mushy Venerian food but found a certain repellent fishy quality in its taste and gave it up. Certainly, I told myself, it that were to be my food in the future, I would be poorly off.

When the food was handed in, I saw two of the Venerians standing guard at the door with the fire-fluid rods. It was quite evident that Nebo was taking no chance of my escape before the ship from Venus came.

And when it came—what then? I asked myself. A voyage in it as a prisoner to another world, a captivity without hope of release in the island-cities of the watery world of Venus?

Captivity—and maybe torture or death! For it was evident that Nebo and the other Venerians fully believed my published statements and were convinced that I had in my possession the knowledge of a method to produce limitless atomic power.

Once on Venus, their scientists would certainly endeavor by all means to wring that supposed secret from me. The murders of space-rock-rocket experimenters, which they had systematically committed on earth to prevent humans attaining interplanetary travel, proved that they would not balk at extreme measures to make me tell them the secret.

I had no secret to tell them, but they would never believe that. They might use the most refined scientific tortures to make me talk. I cursed the inspiration of Captain Crail that was responsible for my issuing those statements. Crail and von Gersten and Artie Melford, would they or

anyone ever know what had happened to me?

Gradually I became aware that I was very tired, and stretching out on the floor of my prison, I slept. When I awoke it was with a sensation of cold, and through the door-cracks I now saw that it was night outside. I had slept through twenty-four hours or more in my weariness.

The next hours passed without incident. I was brought more of the food in the morning, and this time I ate more, for I was extremely hungry. I looked for Nebo to appear again but he did not. With the food this time, though, was brought a sleeping-rug.

I heard Venerians pass outside now and then and once the whirr of a flier that went and returned in a few minutes. I slept fitfully, my dreams dominated by my knowledge that the next twenty-four hours were to be my last on earth if the relief-ship came as expected.

When I woke again and my food was brought, Nebo came too, eyeing me thoughtfully.

"No, we have seen no sign yet of the ship," he said in answer to my first question. "But it should be here sometime soon."

"When it does come, and we take you to put you aboard it with us, I warn you not to make any struggle or effort to escape."

It had been my resolve to make a last-minute attempt to break free, but I did not say so. "Why not?" I asked.

"Because in that case we will have to use force," Nebo answered. "We will take no chance of killing you, of course, but rather than let you delay

us, we will stun you. You will avoid this unpleasant experience by being reasonable."

I said nothing and he went out. I heard him speak to the Venerians guarding my door as he closed it.

In indescribable tenseness I sat waiting for the inevitable moment. Hour after hour passed, morning gave way to noon, and noon to afternoon. By sunset I began to wonder if the ship would come at all.

Almost as I wondered I heard a throaty cry from one of the Venerians outside, repeated instantly by a score of them. I sprang to my feet, trembling. I seemed to hear a faint sound like distant, steady throbbing.

I could hear the Venerians running about outside my prison. Suddenly the door was flung open and Nebo appeared, four armed Venerians with him.

"The ship is arriving!" he told me hastily. "Remember my warning, Dr. Jackson. Come with us quietly."

I stepped out with them into the sunlight, trembling despite myself. The sunset westward threw brilliant light over the enclosure, and the Venerians were running toward the great metal framework at its other side.

Nebo pointed obliquely upward. There, high in the light-streaming heavens, hung a little ball of light dropping rapidly on a steep slant toward the enclosure. And as I saw it, I became aware of a faint, throbbing sound that was rapidly growing louder.

"Quick!" cried Nebo. "We must be at the framework when it lands!"

With him and the Venerian guards close about me, and the other

Venerians running nearby, I was hustled across the enclosure.

Looking up, as I stumbled on with my captors, I saw that the little light-ball was a metal sphere, a huge globular craft, gleaming in the sunset's light, as it sank with slackening speed toward the framework. The throbbing of it was now a loud and continuous thunder in our ears.

It came lower, more and more slowly, a colossal two-hundred foot metal ball sinking toward the framework built to receive it. I was half-way across the enclosure now with Nebo and the other Venerians. Then, as a new sound smote my ears over the thunder of the descending Venerian ship, I looked up.

I yelled, and from Nebo and the Venerians came cries of amazement and alarm. The new sound I had heard was a staccato roar and as it came to a crescendo, I saw an airplane speeding over the enclosure from the east! Behind it were three more and behind those a half-dozen others, roaring at top speed toward the Venerian ship that even now was settling into the framework!

The planes dived and from them came the rattle of their guns speaking over their motors' roar, pouring a leaden hail down on the framework and ship in it! I saw Venerians by the framework fall, saw a door in the great globular ship's curving side swing open and Venerians emerge, pointing up at the planes and shouting.

Nebo forgot me for the moment, cried orders rapidly to the Venerians at the buildings. They ran to the four torpedo-like fliers, and in a moment these soared up toward the planes.

The Venerians holding me sought again to drag me toward the framework and ship, but now I was struggling, fighting with fists and feet.

And as I fought, I saw the airplanes and the Venerian fliers above engaging in a wild dog-fight. Two of the fliers crashed at the same moment against a plane and all three fell.

From the remaining two fliers sprang jets of clear liquid and in quick succession two planes burst into flames and spun downward. But there followed one of the fliers and then the other as remaining planes poured a storm of lead upon them and through their windows and into them.

There was a chorus of yells from the edge of the enclosure and on its eastern and southern embankments appeared troops of men, brown-uniformed soldiers with rifles, running down into the enclosure and firing at the Venerians and the framework holding the ship.

At this, the Venerians left in the enclosure ran toward the framework. I saw them swarming up a metal stairway toward the open door of the huge ship. Nebo and my guards were dragging me despite my struggles toward the mighty framework.

Abruptly three of my guards dropped around me and at the same moment I felt something like a hot iron sear my shoulder. I wrenched free from Nebo and the other guard and stumbled from them, as more rifle-bullets hummed past us.

Nebo and the Venerian ran after me and then suddenly they too collapsed and lay still. There was no

Venerian left living in the enclosure save those clambering into the great ship. And as I dropped to my knees, I saw the last of them hasten into it, saw the great door ponderously close, and then with a sudden terrific, throbbing thunder, whose detonations almost split the ears, the huge ball rose into the air from the framework.

Slowly, majestically, at first, but faster and faster, the mighty sphere rose into the sunset, unheeding of the comparatively tiny airplanes that dashed and stung about it—rose until it was far overhead, a dwindling lightglobe.

Soldiers dashed past me toward the framework and then arms caught and pulled me to my feet. Men in civilian clothes were about me, all crying out together.

"Lloyd!" shouted one of them, and I came out of my daze to recognize Arthur Melford's excited face, and then beside him was Captain Crail, his features taut, and von Gersten with blue eyes flaming with excitement.

"Lloyd, we got here in time!" Arthur was almost weeping. "By heaven, they were taking you to that ship . . ."

"To Venus, yes," I said. "But how did you know that you should come here? How did you learn where their base was?"

"The one I shot!" Crail cried. "We found a metal world-map in his pocket with lines drawn on it all radiating from one point in Eastern Labrador. And von Gersten . . ."

"Von Gersten," the German finished for him, "sees that that point in Eastern Labrador can be but

their base, where they come forth from on their trips over earth. We get the soldiers and the planes and hurry to this point, in time to save you, though their ship gets away, it seems. And you say, to Venus!"

"Yes, Venus!" I exclaimed. "Look, can you see it up there—can you see it yet?"

High in the brilliant western sky the globular ship was now but a little ball of light, diminishing steadily as it rose on a steep slant. Up and up it went, smaller and smaller it became in appearance. And below it we could see another speck of light, but one that was sinking after the sun, the planet Venus dropping from our sight.

Then as we stared in awe, von Gersten and Crail and Arthur and I close together, we saw the receding lightball become a mere pinhead of luminescence, a tiny shining point. It seemed to waver for a moment in our vision, to hesitate. Then it was gone and we stood staring after it into the empty sunset sky.

Chapter V.

Note by Professor Herman von Gersten

There is nothing which I, von Gersten, can add to the known facts of that most astounding series of killings, which has come to be called "the space-rocket murders" and its even more astounding sequel and explanation. The accounts drawn up by my companions and friends of their various experiences in this so-strange adventure summarize those facts completely.

Yet, if the facts need no addition from me, it may yet be that some

comment would not be amiss. So, at least, have Mr. Melford and Captain Crail and Dr. Jackson told me, asking me to attach to their documents my opinions as to the questions which must necessarily arise.

We men of earth have for the first time come into direct contact with beings of another world, who were at least as intelligent as we are. In the Venerians' view of us, as told to Dr. Jackson by Nebo, we humans who rule earth so unquestioningly, for the first time see ourselves as others see us. And what we see is not pretty!

No! We see that to beings with even a little more civilization than ourselves, such as the Venerians, the races of men appear a fierce, hostile and cruel species—a species that utilizes its best intelligence and greatest powers for the conducting of internecine war between its own divisions, an untrustworthy, combative and merciless race to be feared and watched as the Venerians feared and watched us.

To us self-styled civilized races, this view comes as a shock. Is it justified? we must ask ourselves. Were the Venerians wise to distrust us to such an extent as to use any means to prevent us from ever reaching their world? Or have the Venerians been misled by surface aspects and taken precautions which they might have spared themselves?

I think that any reflecting person, who looks without bias at our world and what we have made of it, must agree that the Venerians showed wisdom in the course they took. For let us suppose that when the Venerians first visited earth two hun-

dred years ago, they had made themselves known to the people of earth and had helped them build space-ships like their own. Suppose they had done that fifty years ago—five years ago. What would have been the result?

Would there not have been space-ships sailing from earth to Venus soon, crowded with the curious, the self-seeking, the restless? And when they reached Venus, if they found there anything considered of value by men, gold, precious stones, valuable minerals, who can doubt but that soon more and more ships would have been sailing Venusward, that the Venerians' natural resources would have been ruthlessly exploited, and that when the Venerians resisted, they would have been fought and in time wiped out just as here in our own world the Tasmanians and the Red Indians and a score of other lower races were annihilated?

No, much as we may dislike to admit it, we must confess that the Venerians acted for their own best interests when they deliberately planted spies on earth to retard and prevent entirely, if possible, the development of space-travel by men. And, from their point of view, the few deaths their course occasioned here on earth would be well justified by the prevention of the disastrous consequences if man ever did reach Venus.

But this lies in the past. We know now that the Venerians exist and that they have developed a method of space-sailing. We are aware even of the fact that their numbers are less than ours, though their science

is farther advanced. Their two hundred years of watch on us, through their spies on earth, has been disclosed to us.

Parenthetically, there is small chance, to my mind, that the Venerians will attempt to resume this watch on us. I doubt if they will ever again seek to maintain spies on earth, not only because, since they have been once discovered, their work would be almost impossible, but also because the object of their watch is gone, now that we know all these things and are fully aware that Venus is a habitable and inhabited world.

No, this first secret phase in the relations of Venus and Earth, the one planet's race being entirely unaware of the other's existence, is gone forever. The great question now is, what are the two worlds' relations to be in the future?

It is evident, that if the Venerians have developed space-ships, we also can do so, though perhaps much time must elapse first. But as the scientific knowledge and power of man marches steadily onward, the day must surely come when man, too, will take to space and sail to other worlds. When he sails to Venus, will it be as an invader or a friend?

The Venerians, no doubt, believe that he will come combatively, and probably from now on will be busily preparing weapons with which to resist the hordes of earth that will someday drop out of the sky. Many there will be on earth, too, who will want to see man go as a conqueror, who will vision an empire of humans extending from end to end of the solar system, from Mercury to Pluto.

It may be that their visions will be fulfilled and that the Venerians will go down under a human invasion after long resistance, and their little islands will be peopled by human colonists. It may be that less-developed races on other planets will be exterminated also to the greater glory of humanity. Certainly there will be many in that future day who would thrill to the trumpet-call challenge to bring every planet in our system under the domination of man.

But there is a chance, also, that when man does visit Venus and the other worlds, it will not be as a conqueror but as a friend. There is a chance that by that time man will have seen it for the childish thing it is, unworthy of a mature race. And that chance increases each day, for each day sees us a little farther, a

tiny little, away from the glory in war for war's sake, that formerly was ours.

So the fears of the Venerians may prove vain after all. So the future may bring, not a cruel autocracy of man in the solar system, but a friendly, peaceful association of the solar system's living worlds, with humans, Venerians and whatever other races the system may prove to hold engaged in trade and travel from world to world.

May this prove indeed to be what the future holds! Our solar system, that seems now so vast to us, is in reality but a little, heated, lighted shelter in the cold black immensities of space.

May we different ones who inhabit it refrain always from fighting each other, and dwell in it in enduring peace.

The End



*There before me lay
a narrow valley,
with white steam ris-
ing from a thousand
places*

THE STEAM GOD

WALTER KATELEY

Illustrated by WESSO

THE "lost civilization" theme was a favorite one of early SF authors. Cities within the earth and civilizations below the sea became the backbone for a myraid number of Atlantean tales. None of them, however, contained a culture like this one—an almost modern people who still practice human sacrifice by throwing their victims the very "spring of steam" which enables them to exist in a tropical oasis located on the arctic ice-cap!

WE were members of the Kingsford Arctic Expedition.

We were at an altitude of about four thousand feet, flying due south. In every direction, as far as we could see, were the white wastes of the Arctic polar regions.

Evidently we were over thick glacier ice, for there was a slight tinge of blue to the surface, except where long rifts of dazzling white marked extensive pressure ridges.

As I swept the encircling landscape with my glass, I detected a long, irregular streak of faint color away to the west. It was of an indefinite green tint; and I wondered if it could be the outcropping of a mountain range.

I wished we might turn aside to explore it. But I knew that to do so was out of the question, for we had flown much farther afield than our gas supply warranted, led on by new and interesting sights that we believed no Arctic explorer had ever seen.

It was imperative for safety's sake that we take the straightest and quickest route back to our base.

We were still beyond the safe flying radius for planes of the type used by our expedition, and we knew that in case of disaster to our machine there would be little if any chance of our being found or rescued. I pointed to the rift of color, and passed my glass to Hadley, who was piloting the plane. At that moment a foreign sound mingled with the rhythmic hum of the engine, and instantly our whole attention was turned to the machine, for evidently something was the matter. The motor commenced to labor and an unmistakable odor warned us that she was getting hot. Hadley cut off the spark and tilted our course earthward. The motor was so hot that it refused to stop but throbbed on. As I reached to cut off the flow of gas, there was an explosion and a flash of flame. The machine was on fire and I knew there was no time to

lose. As I inserted a finger in the ring of my ready parachute the flames roared past me.

I closed my eyes and jumped.

A few moments later I was fairly launched on my way to the ground, in comparative safety. I looked about me and caught a glimpse of the flaming, smoking machine, far away and below me, catapulting to earth. I hoped my companion had been able to get clear; but I could see no other parachute, and my hopes died. I landed very safely on rough ice, and hastily gathering up my parachute, I hurried away to where a dark blotch marked the end of the descent of the plane.

Everything combustible was burnt. The metal skeleton of the machine had struck the ice with terrific force, utterly demolishing it. In the midst of it all was the charred and mangled remains of poor Hadley.

How long I stood there, dazed and stupefied, helplessly staring at this terrible sight, I do not know. But I was aroused by a consciousness that I was very cold. I realized that inaction in such a climate, in spite of my warm aviator's clothes, would very shortly end my career, so I decided to cover the wreck with my blue parachute, in order to mark the place in the vast expanse of white, and venture forth in search of shelter.

Hurriedly, and with stiff, numb hands, I fastened the cloth over the tangled mass as best I could and turned away. I was sick with horror and half paralyzed with cold. I had no notion of where I was going. I ran, aimlessly, stumblingly, blunderingly, over the ice. Presently, as

my heart commenced to race and my circulation sped up, I felt more comfortable; and my mind began to function more normally. I slowed my pace and tried to plan some course of action.

Here I was, alone in the wastes of the Arctic, far north of the haunts of any living thing. No bird or animal, not even a fox, could support life on this eternal ice. There was no land; only endless snow and ice. All I had was the meagre one-day emergency ration that all members of the expedition were required to carry upon their persons when away from the base. I had my knife and watch and some matches. Yes; and I now realized that I had thrust the telescope into my coat pocket also.

I took it out and looked at it. Then I remembered for the first time the faraway streak of green. Here was a gleam of hope. Possibly it would prove a refuge!

No doubt it was far off. But it would be better to be striving for a definite goal than to wander about aimlessly over the desert of snow and ice until certain death should overtake me.

I made my way to the top of a neighboring pressure ridge and tried to get my bearings and clear up my sense of direction. Since we had been flying south when I saw the rift of color, and it had appeared directly on my right, it must be in the west. I turned toward the southern sky. There was the sun showing dimly through the frosty air. I took out my watch and saw that it was a quarter after twelve. That meant the sun was nearly due south; and the minute hand of the watch should

point west when I turned the dial so as to make the hour hand point to the sun.

But how was I to keep a straight course? There was no sign of a landmark. The ice in every direction had as much of a sameness as the waves of the ocean.

I was again feeling the cold, so I decided to keep the sun on my left and trust to good luck. It didn't seem as though I would be likely to miss the place so badly that I would be unable to pick it out with my glass. It had seemed quite long, subtending an angle of perhaps five degrees. I took one last look back at the dark speck that marked the scene of the recent tragedy and pushed off. Now that I had a definite plan, I felt a little heartened. I picked up a fragment of ice and put it in my mouth to quench my growing thirst and tried to estimate how far away the green patch probably was.

It had not been visible to the eye except through the glass; and since it was a day of fair visibility, I judged that one could see probably sixty-five miles from that far height with the unaided eye. So it would not be reasonable to suppose that the place was much less than that distance away. On the other hand, it might be considerably farther. Suppose I could travel twenty-five miles a day? It would take me nearly three days to reach it.

It was a disheartening outlook. I had meagre rations even for one day. I had no snowshoes. If I encountered soft snow I could not hope to make progress. Fortunately, I had stout boots that could reasonably be expected to hold out as long as my strength would last.

But would the sun continue to shine for three consecutive days? If its position should be obscured, I would have no guide; and in that case I knew that if I kept on I should naturally travel in a wide circuit and be lost.

Of course the sun would not set in this high latitude at this season; and its course from east to west was so short that, knowing the time of day, I could easily gauge my course fairly well. It seemed that my only salvation lay in the chance that there would be no storm.

All the long afternoon I trudged on. At six o'clock I halted and erected a slight wind-break with some broken chunks of ice. There I rested a while and ate sparingly of my emergency ration. I would go on until midnight; and then, if I could find any kind of shelter, I would lie down and sleep.

So I wound my watch and started on. At about one o'clock I came upon some block ice—that is, ice that has been broken up into large, irregular chunks and piled haphazard. Among these chunks was loose snow. I sought out a place somewhat sheltered from the cold wind, made a little burrow in the snow, and lay down to sleep.

I wondered if I would ever wake up; and if I did survive the night in the snow, wouldn't it be frozen so hard around me that I could never get out?

But I was so exhausted that I soon fell asleep and slept soundly until seven o'clock.

To my great relief, I found upon waking that I was neither dead nor frozen fast in the snow; but on standing up I found I was stiff with the

cold and every one of my muscles was sore. The good old sun, although dim, was still there. I ate the remainder of my emergency ration and started again for the west. My progress for the next two days was painful and tedious, but not very eventful.

I encountered a number of wide crevasses in the deep ice floe, and was obliged to make several long detours. By the end of the third day, I was weak from my long fast and exhausted by the constant exertion.

I felt sure that, in spite of all detours and rough going, I must have traveled at least sixty miles; and I could not imagine why I had not come within sight of my goal.

If it was a range of mountains, or an outcropping of light green rock, and I had been going all the time in something like the right direction, I should be able to see it now even without the glass.

During the whole day and the preceding day I had repeatedly taken the telescope from my inside pocket, where I now carried it to keep it free from frost, and had scanned the entire horizon for signs of outcroppings. But it had been a fruitless search. There was absolutely nothing but limitless fields of ice and snow. Could it have been an optical illusion? Or had I traveled in the wrong direction and so missed it?

I wished that Hadley had seen it, too. Then I would know that there was really something there. I came upon some broken ice and snow, such as had served me the previous nights for shelter, and made my usual preparations for sleep. I was so starved and utterly exhausted that I felt the end was not far off.

I wondered dimly if it would be better on the morrow to seek a somewhat sheltered place and await the inevitable in comparative comfort. Or would it be better to keep struggling on to the bitter end?

In the morning I woke still feeling very weak and disheartened.

A little way off I saw a pressure ridge where the ice was heaved to quite a height. I made my way to the highest point and strained my eyes to scan the landscape. I could see nothing unusual. I adjusted the glass with trembling hands and examined the western horizon.

No. There was nothing but ice. But wait! There was something! A bit of white mist, or was it snow against the darker color of the glacial ice?

My heart began to beat fast with excitement, although reason told me that a wisp of fog in the early morning was nothing to get excited about. Still, it was perhaps something more than coincidence that it was located in the very direction where I had hoped to find something unusual; and besides, it appeared too definitely localized to be the result of general weather conditions.

I tucked the instrument under my clothes, next to my body, to warm it and make sure it was free from frost. Then I wiped off the lens and looked again.

Yes, surely enough, there was something of an unfamiliar aspect. It could hardly be a snowbank, because it was too billowy. And it did not look like a cloud, either. It must be either smoke or steam. I could not imagine what could cause steam, unless there might be open water there.

I had often seen fog or steam rising over lakes and ponds in the early morning in temperate climates. But nothing short of a volcano could cause smoke in a country where there was no vegetation to burn, and volcanoes were only on mountain tops.

Well, no matter what it was, I must reach it. But I found myself under a strange hallucination. There were now two of us. One here on the ice ridge and the other over there a little way, asleep in the snow. I felt that I must hurry back and rouse him and tell him to take new heart and press on, for yonder was a hopeful sight.

No, I reflected, it could not be. For I had had no companion on the march. Perhaps I was still asleep in the snow and only dreaming of a bank of mist.

I had been standing still for some time in this exposed place, and I knew I was wretchedly cold. I swung my arms frantically and ran down among the ice blocks to escape the cold wind.

Gradually my thoughts cleared as my circulation increased, and I knew I was alone and up and about. Moreover, I had no time to lose. I must go quickly, while my strength held out. I was terrified at this indication of the weakening of my mind. I ran back up to the tip of the little rise and looked again.

Yes, it was there. I could see it dimly with the naked eye. I only hesitated to make sure of the direction and fix it in my mind before I struck off as fast as I could go in my weakened condition, I didn't walk; I ran. I ran for what seemed a long

time. Then I seemed to remember that I had left somebody back there, asleep in the snow. Why had I done such a thing? Why had I not roused him and urged him to come with me?

It was only a momentary thought. Instantly I recognized the old enemy. I must be overexerting myself. I was sapping my system of the little strength that still remained. I must slow up and conserve my vitality. I fell into a brisk walk.

Soon I topped a little rise and saw again the bank of mist. This time it seemed to be a little closer. I hurried on. What if it should prove to be only open water when I arrived? Still, there would be a possibility of fish or some aquatic thing to be captured for food, and maybe driftwood or something to make a fire.

I no longer had to look for the sun to direct my course. From the top of every little ridge I could see this thing I was striving to reach.

But I felt myself growing weaker. My feet were as heavy as lead, and I stumbled awkwardly whenever I encountered a rough spot.

Yet I had no notion to give up the fight. There is in the cold countries an almost unbelievable vitality, an unquenchable instinct to live that does not exist elsewhere in the world. It is a matter of common knowledge to men who have lived in the Far North that both men and animals will survive hardships and recover from injuries that would unquestionably be fatal in any other climate.

Perhaps it was this Arctic will to live that kept me up. At any rate, I perceived at last that the mists were

visible not only from the top of the ridges but from the level as well.

I must be getting quite close, and with renewed hope I pressed on.

I looked at my watch. It was noon. I had been on the way five hours. I took out the glass again and examined the mist. It was now clear that it was mist. I thought I could see it moving and changing in shape; and some of it seemed to be drifting away with the wind.

Yes, and to the south of it there was now visible an expanse of glare ice. It must be fog of some sort, rising from I knew not what; and as it blew away and condensed, it was falling in fine rain!

Surely, I thought, there must be a great deal of warmth of some kind there, if nothing else; and I fought off the now almost overpowering feeling of weariness and tried to ignore the cutting cold of the fierce north wind.

The last few miles of my journey I remember only very dimly.

Once I wondered what time it was. But it seemed as though I had no watch—that I had left it behind with the man who was asleep back there in the snow. With an effort I overcame the delusion and took out my watch. It was two-thirty. I couldn't seem to get it back in my pocket. I let it hang by its short leather guard.

At length I encountered a steep upgrade, and the rising mists were close at hand. I dropped on my knees and pulled myself along with my hands. My arms seemed much stronger than my legs. I struggled on to the top. Was this a mountain? Could it be a volcano?

I stood up and peered over the crest of the rise. A wholly unexpected sight met my astonished eyes and a breath of warm wind filled my nostrils.

There before me lay a narrow green valley, with white steam rising from a thousand places!

I stood transfixed. I could hardly believe my senses.

Could it be that this was a dream, a vision? I had heard that people dying in the desert saw visions most inviting.

I almost suspected that the whole last day's trek was only visionary, and that I was actually lying in the snow, away back there where I had dug in for the night—about to start into the Great Unknown.

I pulled myself together with a feeling of impatience and started along the slippery way to look for a place where it would be possible to descend. One of my feet slipped and I fell, and I felt the impact of the hard ice. I was conscious of a swift, gliding motion, like a toboggan on an icy slide. It must have been several hours later that I regained consciousness. I opened my eyes and looked about me. It was nearly dark. The Arctic sun must have sunk to a very low level, possibly as low as it ever does in the season of the mid-night sun.

I knew I must be down in the deep gulch, because it was warm, blissfully warm!

I felt no pain, but I was very tired, so I turned over on my left side and went to sleep.

When I awoke it was ten o'clock and much lighter. I got up and found that I had been lying on a low ledge

of rock which was but partially covered with loose soil.

A few feet away was a crack in the rock, and out of it came hissing a number of little jets of steam.

Looking up, I saw that a great white steam cloud obscured the whole sky.

I congratulated myself on being still alive, and cast about in quest of food. I was ravenously hungry. There was vegetation all about me, but it was very pale, having the light green color peculiar to plants grown in cellars and dark places.

The west side of the valley was very steep, almost a sheer cliff, and the entire wall was covered with clinging vines that almost hid the face of the rock and continued to the very top of the wall. The east side was not so steep; and the snow and ice found lodgment between rocky out-croppings and extended in places well down into the valley. It was at such a place, fortunately, that I had lost my footing and came sliding down.

At this point the valley was only a few rods wide. I could not see how long it was on account of the stream obstructing my vision; but because of the size of the cloud I had seen, I knew that this valley or others like it must be quite extensive. A little stream of clear water trickled down the hill and disappeared in a crevice in the rocks.

I lay down and drank deeply. It was the first real water I had seen for a long time.

I now started along the bottom of the valley, and soon came to where the sun appeared over the top of the high bank and flooded everything with a pale, sickly glow.

I wondered how any vegetation could grow with so little light. It was, however, plain to be seen that there was no lack of heat.

By this time I was carrying my coat on my arm. I scanned the pale but abundant vegetation for anything edible, and soon found a few low bushes with buds that looked something like pussy-willows.

I picked some and ate them. I found them to be quite palatable.

A little further on I came upon some wild leeks growing on a jutting rock. The soil was thin and I had no trouble in pulling them up. They proved to be mild, and I ate quite a quantity of them. Then I searched along the valley for quite a distance without finding anything that looked at all fit to eat.

Steam was jetting from cracks and holes in the ground all about me. I had to be careful not to burn myself. I was about to turn back and retrace my steps to where I had found the leeks, when I came upon a seemingly different sort of soil, covering the whole bottom of the gorge.

Thinking this soil might give rise to a different kind of vegetation, I continued a little further, and was soon rewarded by finding a thick growth of mushrooms. I saw at once that they were of an edible variety.

So I gathered a quantity of them and ate them raw. They tasted far different from cooked mushrooms, and by no strength of the imagination could I call them good. But I knew they were wholesome and filling, and I was in no position to be finicky.

After I had eaten my fill, I sat down to rest on a little ledge of rock near an especially noisy jet of steam.

I gave myself up to the consideration of my strange situation.

In the first place, after giving the matter some thought, I realized that it was not a very uncommon occurrence for natural steam to issue from the earth in quite large quantities. I knew of the location of several valleys in widely separated parts of the world that contained these so-called fumaroles or steam jets.

It so happened that only the year before I had joined the expedition my brother, who is an engineer, had been preparing an article on "Power Available from Natural Steam," and not being busy at the time, I had been drafted to do part of his research work.

In this way I had come upon some quite striking facts.

At Healdsburg Valley, in California, not far from San Francisco, there are a number of fumaroles where very hot steam pours out; and recently a number of deep wells have been drilled near by, with gratifying results.

In some of these wells, 12 inches in diameter, a pressure of over three hundred pounds has been developed; enough steam to drive tremendously heavy turbines and furnish almost unlimited heat and power.

The noise of escaping steam at one of these wells is so terrible that workmen and others are obliged to stop their ears with cotton before approaching it.

In the Yellowstone National Park there are a great number of geysers and fumaroles, where hot steam is liberated. In one locality the shriek

of escaping steam can be heard for miles.

In far-off New Zealand there is a tract of thousands of square miles more or less thickly covered with active fumaroles and hot springs.

At Larderello, Italy, southwest of Florence, steam piped from a number of wells is used to operate a great factory, and numerous other wells within a radius of 80 miles of this mill are utilized for industrial purposes. It has been estimated that this steam comes from a region where the temperature is 3,200° F.

In Italy alone there has been developed three and one-half million horsepower from natural steam, and a great deal more is available.

At the city of Beppu, on an island of Japan, natural steam has been harnessed to drive a steam engine and operate a turbine and an electric generator.

Although I was entirely familiar with these facts, I had never before thought of the possibility of a fumarole valley in the land of eternal snow. But since the internal heat of the earth could be but little affected by surface weather, and since the heat of all fumaroles comes from the intense heat of the Great Magma, or molten mass of the remote interior of the earth, there seemed no logical reason for being surprised at finding a steam-heated valley in this latitude.

And now it occurred to me why I had seen the valley as a green patch from the air, but only as a cloud of mist from the surface of the ice field.

From the air I was able to see down into the valley and catch a glimpse of the green foliage, con-

trasting with the surrounding blue-white of the snow. However, none of this greenness was to be seen from the ground; and had it not been for the steam-cloud, I never should have mustered strength to travel so far.

I felt a great sense of relief at having escaped from the snow fields, and the full meal I had eaten gave me such a sense of well-being that I felt little concern about how I was to make my way back to civilization. That was to come later.

Soon the soft, mist-filtered rays of the sun, combined with the warmth given off by the steam, made me drowsy; so I removed my boots, in order to use them for a pillow, and composed myself for another comfortable sleep.

It was eight o'clock next morning when I awoke from a long and refreshing slumber.

The sun was not high enough to show above the rim of ice, and the whole valley was shrouded in deep gloom. While I waited for more light, with which to explore the valley and forage for food, I meditated on the possibility of developing power from all this escaping steam, though I thought of what use could power be in such a place? I had no idea until later.

Finally the sun rose high enough to percolate into the depths of the gorge; and after eating a few more of the mushrooms, I continued my tour of exploration.

I had only progressed a little way when I found the valley was growing smaller, and presently it narrowed to a mere canyon. Evidently it was coming to an end. I was quite surprised at this, because I had judged from what was apparent from the air

and from the steam cloud, that it must be several miles in extent. I had entered near the other end of it; and thus far I had not traversed over a mile and a half of its extent.

As the walls closed nearer together and became more precipitous, I approached a steam vent somewhat larger and noisier than any I had yet encountered. The escaping steam made a sort of high-pitched, angry whine that was strikingly like a protesting human voice. It was an unpleasant sound, and it rose and fell with a vibrating rhythm that was quite disconcerting.

At this point the wall on my left was quite perpendicular; but the one on the right was somewhat sloping, although very steep. The bottom of the valley was no more than a dozen feet wide.

To my surprise, I found the surface so hot when I approached the fumarole, that I was obliged to turn back. At first it seemed that I would not be able to go any further in that direction; but upon examining the slanting right bank, I discovered a narrow path that led up and beyond the heated area.

This discovery was somewhat of a surprise to me, for heretofore I had seen no signs of animal or human life. To be sure, the track was dim and indistinct, and might very possibly mark a rift in the underlying rock, or some old-time water course. I examined it for tracks. There were none discernible. I followed the course up the steep incline, passing the steam jet rather fearfully, thinking what an unpleasant experience it would be, if I should miss my footing and step into it.

As I had more than half expected,

the path, if I could call it that, descended again to the canyon floor, and after looking carefully about for other signs of life, I continued on my way.

And now the gap commenced to widen, and I saw ahead of me a curve in the walls.

As I rounded this curve, I caught a glimpse of receding hillsides and the vista of a long, widening valley.

I hastened forward eagerly, coming suddenly upon a little puddle of mud; and while watching to make sure of my own footing, I noticed a track beside a flat stone. It was very evidently a fresh track. I paused to examine it.

It appeared to be the imprint of four or five large toes. I could not make sure which, because of the softness of the mud, and I made out the ball of a wide foot. The track was so close to the stone that I suspected a part of the great foot might have rested on it, with only the forward portion sunk in the ooze.

It might be the track of a bear, of some of the great cat family, or even of a giant human being!

Whatever it was, it must be of awe-inspiring size. I glanced fearfully about, but there was no living thing in sight.

I hurried on toward the wider valley. Suddenly as I rounded a boulder, I came face to face with two giant men.

They were of such extraordinary size and their appearance was so unexpected that I stopped dead in my tracks.

My first impulse was to turn and run back into the narrow canyon. But I saw that one of the men carried something like a long weapon. I was

not sure that it might not be some kind of a gun with which to shoot me if I tried to escape. On second thought, I decided the wisest course would be to make no resistance and trust to their friendly instincts to preserve me. I had no weapon aside from my long hunting-knife, and besides I was a mere infant in size compared with them. So I stood watching their approach with as much calmness as I could muster.

Evidently the spirit of the chase was upon them, for without slackening their pace they pounced upon me, bearing me in a heap to the ground.

For a moment they held me fast, face downward.

Then I heard one of them speak. He was evidently convinced that there was no need of such drastic measures, and his tone was manifestly one of expostulation. His point of view apparently prevailed, for I was grasped by the shoulders and raised to my feet. And now, while they examined me and commented in a strange language, I had an opportunity to observe them more in detail.

The most striking thing about them was their extraordinary size. I judged they were at least ten feet tall and large in proportion.

Their skins were very light; in fact, they showed an unnatural pallor, like one who has lived too much indoors. Both had flaming red hair. They did not appear to be savages. I noted that their faces were shaven. Their hair was neatly trimmed and their meagre clothing revealed none of the crudeness of barbarism.

They were very scantily dressed, each having but a single garment:

Short, trunk-like trousers, extending half way to the knee, but continued at the top and tapered to form a wide band that passed over the right shoulder. This was held from slipping off by a narrow strip around the chest, just below the arms.

Aside from their unhealthy pallor, both appeared to be in robust condition.

One of them continued to grasp me firmly by the upper arm with a great hand that seemed to take up the greater part of the space from the shoulder to the elbow.

I suppose I presented a very grotesque appearance, with several days' growth of beard on my face and my heavy winter clothing sadly disheveled from my recent vicissitudes.

I noticed with some feeling of reassurance that my captors were now grinning rather broadly as they discussed me with great heavy voices, that seemed well in keeping with their huge size. I now saw that what had at first appeared to be weapons were only a very long and very shiny sort of horn or trumpet.

One of the men addressed a question to me.

"I do not understand you," I said. At the sound of my voice they both laughed. The one bearing the trumpet raised it to his mouth and spoke a sentence into it.

To my surprise, it did not magnify or change his voice in any way that I could detect, and I was at a loss to understand the significance of the act.

Now my captors prepared to go. They placed me between them, and started back in the direction whence they came.

They walked with such long, rapid strides that I was forced to hurry at a brisk trot to keep up with them.

This larger valley that we were approaching now commenced to reveal itself in detail; and to my great surprise I caught sight of a number of buildings in the distance. Then, as we came out from the narrow canyon, I noticed that the whole valley as far as I could see was thickly studded with long, low buildings that resembled greenhouses; and as we approached the nearest of them, I saw that it was indeed a greenhouse, and that it was full of growing plants.

A little further on we came to a miniature lake, and shortly after this we passed what I took to be the mouth of a mine, where some ponderous machinery appeared to be bringing quantities of pulverized stone out of the workings, elevating it to the top of the hill and carrying it away to be dumped, I imagined, in the eternal snows of the upper region.

There were men at work about this machinery and around the many greenhouses, all of the same giant stature as my captors.

I noticed that those who caught sight of us stopped to stare in apparent astonishment.

It seemed like hard luck to be so unceremoniously set upon and hurried away captive by a pair of giants. But since seeing so many evidences of civilization, I began to take heart; for there could be but little doubt that I was in the midst of a community not entirely uncultured.

The valley appeared to average about fifteen rods wide at this point. Scattered here and there over its bot-

tom, and even part way up the steep sides, were innumerable jets of steam, some large and some small; some almost silent, others hissing noisily.

At length we came to a great stone arch, built in an almost perpendicular bluff that now formed one of the walls of the valley. I was hustled through the arch and hurried along an extensive, dimly lighted corridor. Finally turning aside, we entered a high, vaulted room and approached a man seated at a high desk.

This new giant looked me over carefully and listened with interest to what my captors had to say. Apparently they recapitulated the events of my capture. Later I was taken to a tiny apartment, not greatly differing from an ordinary jail cell, and was left to my own meditations.

All that had taken place seemed like an extraordinary performance. Everything I had seen, since entering the larger valley, was of a nature to indicate that these people were far from a state of savagery.

Then why had I, a perfect stranger from an unknown country, been treated with so little consideration, such absolute lack of all semblance of the courtesy ordinarily accorded the foreign stranger and traveler? I could not have been treated with less consideration if I had been a criminal.

Well perhaps I was a criminal to these people. Perhaps I had unknowingly committed some crime against the laws of the community, and in that case I had naturally fallen into the hands of the police department.

Yes, on second thought, it all seemed like a typical action of a typical police department the world over; blundering, inefficient, bull-headed, discourteous and in no way representative of the community they serve.

I tried to visualize the conception of American civilization that a stranger might form, solely from contact with the police department of any of our modern cities.

The result of my meditation was to put me in a more hopeful frame of mind. I wound my watch and settled down to await developments with a feeling that my fate might easily have been worse.

They had taken away my knife and telescope, but had evidently overlooked my timepiece. At six o'clock some food was brought, and I ate with a good appetite. It consisted of a fragment of fish and a large bowl of some kind of porridge. The light in the compartment was so dim that I was unable to make out the ingredients of the dish; but it was very palatable, and I was in no mood to be squeamish.

Before going to sleep, I indulged in some entertaining air-castle building. In my mind's eye I constructed an inter-continental air-pline service line across the short Arctic route, with a wonderful steam-heated and modern-equipped landing stage strategically located in this valley. Here could be had food and repairs and comfortable quarters for crew and passenger. Here, too, the blasé globe-trotter might even yet get a thrill of adventure in seeing the strange people and their unique little world. I believe I was considering the possibility of selling

exhibit concessions when I fell asleep.

I slept well and in the morning felt quite recovered from my recent long journey. Just before noon one of the men who had brought me here came and led me forth to new adventures.

We passed out through the long hall, the same way we had entered, and although the light was still very dim, I now perceived that there were numerous doors on either side with curiously wrought inscriptions above them.

We emerged into the steam-saturated atmosphere of the valley and walked a little way up the street, if I might call the stone-paved walk along the base of the cliff a street, and came presently to another great arched opening in the hillside.

This arch was much loftier and grander than the one we had just left, and was beautifully carved with delicately wrought designs.

There were two statues of some strange and ponderous animals that I failed to recognize, one on each side of the portal, which was reached by a broad flight of steps, which were evidently carved from the natural rock.

I noticed that my captor and conductor wore sandals on his feet and had headgear bearing some sort of insignia of office.

I was not greatly surprised when, after traversing a long and spacious corridor, he ushered me into a large, well-lighted room, where a number of people were assembled in a way that suggested a court scene; and a court it proved to be.

Presently the judge entered and

took his seat between two images of the steam god.

He was dressed in a costume not greatly unlike that of my captor and of others I had seen, except for the headdress, although the material seemed to be of a finer texture.

He wore an elaborate head-dress, decorated with a profusion of varicolored streamers that hung down over his vast shoulders, and I fancied detracted from rather than added to the dignity of his appearance.

For the first time since my arrival, it appeared that I had awakened some general interest.

The large room was soon filled with curious spectators, and every one showed an inclination to press forward for a closer view of me.

Knowing nothing of their language, I was of course ignorant of the meaning of all that was said in court. But later, when I came to know something of their speech, I learned the meaning of what took place and how it came about; and I will tell of it in the light of my later discoveries. But in order to make it all comprehensible, I must also tell a little of the history, customs and religion of the newly discovered race. Their origin is lost in the gloom of antiquity. They have, as practically all civilized races have, a mass of legends dealing with the creation of the earth and the origin of man.

The peculiar isolation of their position precludes all knowledge of the outside world and of any other people.

I imagine they sprang from a remnant of an ancient prehistoric people who inhabited quite a large section of the country when it was a semi-

tropical region before the last ice age, that is to say, at the time when tropical and semi-tropical plants were growing to form the fossilized remains found in Spitzbergen and the Arctic regions.

Upon the coming of the ice age, it is reasonable to suppose that a few of them gathered in this warm valley to escape the unbearable cold, perhaps making their primitive homes in natural caves, close to the warmth-giving fumaroles. Then, as the tribe increased and the supply of natural food became scarce, they excavated new caves to provide larger and better homes and commenced to grow food under artificial conditions.

Their actual history goes back some eight thousand years and is inseparably bound up with the development of their written language, which has gone through several phases of development and is yet a somewhat cumbersome vehicle of expression. Regarding the reason for their gigantic size, I have as yet found but the vaguest of theories.

As to their religion, it is very simple and very stern. It has to do almost entirely with the relations between man and Deity, and touches but slightly on the relations between man and man. They worship a Steam God, as one might naturally expect.

The theory is that there is a Great Spirit residing within the bowels of the earth, who controls the destiny of all living things.

The physical being of their deity is made up of an inconceivably great volume of living steam.

The steam jets issuing from the ground are the divine gift of warmth

and life, generously given by the god to his creatures, from the ample proportions of his own body; and are a constant and ever-present manifestation of the divine spirit.

There is, at about the center of the valley—which is twelve miles long—a quiescent geyser.

This geyser is of much the same nature as many of those encountered by the tourist in Yellowstone Park; simply a large opening in the rock floor of the valley, perhaps twenty feet in diameter, and only the Steam God knows how deep. Steam and gas fumes constantly pour out; and if one is brave enough to approach sufficiently near to look down into the abyss, it is possible to discern a turbid mass of seething and boiling liquid far below; while sounds of angry turmoil are dimly audible for some little distance in all directions.

This caldron is esteemed to be the chief manifestation of the holy spirit, and is dedicated as a temple to the worship of the god. And as a last relic of their former barbarism, they still persist in an old belief that the deity requires them to offer human sacrifice of an adult person at this place once a year. The manner of the sacrifice is of course obvious.

Another phase of their religion is that the little valley which I first discovered is forbidden ground to all human beings and is reserved for the pleasure of the divine spirit alone. This tenet, I have no doubt, was suggested by the strange, protesting voice of the active fumarole that I passed in the narrow canyon between the two valleys.

However that may be, there is a deeply respected law that no one ex-

cept an ordained priest may ever, under any circumstances, enter the valley, and even the priests are permitted to enter it only on certain feast days, and only for the purpose of communing with the Steam God. The penalty for disobedience to this law has always been death. And so I was a criminal of the deepest dye; and there could be no doubt that the Steam God was very angry. I was led before the judge, who inspected me long and gravely. I was then directed to take a seat in a giant chair directly before the bench.

A priest came forward and, upon being recognized by the judge, proceeded to speak. His clothes were not unlike the others, except that he wore a sombre-colored hood that continued down over and completely enveloped his shoulders. His bearing was very grave and sanctimonious.

He told how he had been sent the previous day, which happened to be a holy day, by the chief priest to commune with the deity in the sacred valley.

Midway in the narrow canyon he had heard sounds of my approach, and had only stayed long enough to catch a glimpse of me before he had hurried back post-haste, to where he had been able to borrow a broad-casting trumpet, with which he had notified the police of my transgression. He went on to point out that no layman had ever desecrated the holy ground and been allowed to live, and that it was the duty of the community, through the medium of the court, to appease the wrath of the ruling spirit by putting me to death. Following the priest, the of-

ficer who had brought me to court, and who had helped to capture me, told of my arrest.

The judge questioned him at some length as to whether I had tried to escape and if I had offered any resistance or if I had spoken to him. He answered in the negative.

After this, he regarded me long and thoughtfully. Then he addressed me, asking whence I came. Not knowing what he said (being, as I said before, entirely ignorant of their language at that time), but comprehending from his inflection that it was a question, I replied in speech equally unintelligible to him that I did not understand his question.

Then an old man came forward and addressed the court.

He argued that while the drastic law was no doubt just and pleasing to the Great Spirit, it was not necessarily applicable to me.

In the first place, I was a creature from some unknown region, possibly from some other steam-heated valley, far out across the ice fields, who, knowing nothing of their laws or religion, had innocently come upon the forbidden valley. Then, too, it might be that I was a properly accredited priest in the community whence I came and so was especially privileged. Perhaps I was sent direct from the Great Spirit, in order to test the mercy and tolerance of his people.

The judge listened, but somewhat impatiently, and presently issued his verdict. The verdict was to the effect that I must be placed in confinement until next annual sacrifice



day and then be thrown into the temple caldron, in lieu of the community sacrifice.

He added that if by any chance I should be an envoy of the Steam God, throwing me in the caldron would not injure me, because the Great Spirit had ample power to preserve his own.

And now a very studious-looking giant came forward and approached

the magistrate. This was Chunen, an eminent chemist and scientist. He requested the court to deliver me to his keeping. He said that he desired me for purposes of scientific research and offered to be personally responsible for my custody and appearance when demanded by the law.

The judge assured him that he would take his petition under advisement and render an early decision.

I heard about all this later, when I had learned the language.

I had a feeling that all was not well and that this man was interceding in my behalf. So as he turned to pass out, I took my watch out of my pocket and offered it to him.

He took it and looked at it very critically, caught the sound of its

tick, placed it to his ear a moment and then returned it to me and hastened away.

I was returned to my cramped compartment in the dim light and left there again to my own devices, at that time still happily ignorant of what was in store for me.

The next day the scientist came for me, bearing a court order delivering me to his custody. He led me away, not unkindly, to his home and laboratory.

These were rooms similar to the public rooms I had already seen, except that they were much smaller and lower and, like the others, they were apparently excavated from the solid rock.

Here Chunen set to work to teach me to speak his language. Needless to say, I was very anxious to learn and proved myself to be a studious if not an apt pupil.

I was soon assigned odd jobs in the laboratory. These jobs I did very carefully and thoroughly.

I soon found that these people possessed no paper; but all books and pictures were printed on thin sheets of metal, very light and flexible and very tough.

Such pictures as were available helped me immensely in learning the language.

As soon as I was able to speak at all conversationally, the scientist commenced to question me eagerly about my home, country and the manner of my coming.

As my vocabulary and descriptive ability increased, his amazement grew and his interest became more keen.

At length he practically aban-

doned his regular occupation, giving his entire time to teaching and questioning me. He took copious volumes of notes and never tired of trying to comprehend the crude drawings that I made of things I could not describe in words.

I was very anxious to go out to explore the rest of the strange valley inhabited by these remarkable people, but Chunen would not let me leave his apartments alone.

"I will go with you," he said, "as soon as you are able to understand what I tell you about the things you see. But you cannot go alone, because you are a prisoner. I will tell you all in good time and why are you in custody."

He treated me very kindly, however, and a feeling of real fellowship grew up between us.

When at length we did go forth to see the sights, I found there were a great many things of interest.

In the first place, I found there were nearly a million of these people, living in artistically constructed and well appointed homes. Their dwellings, mines and other excavations reached back into the hills for miles.

Regular streets are laid out, with dwellings on either side, the same as in our cities. Houses are numbered from the entrance at the valley.

The streets are high arched tunnels, and the homes are for the most part suites of three or four rooms, separated by thick partitions of the original rock. Most rooms have arched ceilings.

The light green stone that seems to be everywhere present is fairly soft to cut.

Chemical analysis in Chunen's laboratory showed it to be limestone, colored by the presence of iron and other minerals. With their steam-driven mining machines they are able to carve out one of these homes in from two to three weeks. The floors and walls are smoothed with power-driven polishing machines, and mural artists put on the finishing touches with chiseled carvings and paintings.

In some districts there are two streets, one above the other, with intercommunicating stairs at short intervals.

Iron and a few other minerals are mined quite extensively, and one coal mine is in operation. There is, however, not much need for coal, except to smelt the minerals, since there is an abundance of steam for all heat and power purposes.

I learned that the food of these people consists largely of mushrooms, which are grown in long underground galleries, where the light is artificial and the only soil is brought in from the erosion deposits in the valley.

The mushrooms, which grow in great abundance, are very large and wholesome.

Not only are these mushrooms used for human consumption, but large quantities of them are fed to the fish and the ganos, which are the only domestic animals these people possess. I shall return to describe them presently.

Owing to the fact that my friend (and jailor) was a bachelor and employed only male assistants and servants, I had seen very little of the women of this strange race, until I

started on the personally conducted tours; but now I saw them nearly everywhere I went.

They were not so large and robust as the men, being on an average a foot shorter in stature. Even so, they seemed tremendously large to me. Like the men, they are all very light of skin; and all have red hair. For the most part they seem to bear themselves with a stateliness and dignity very much in keeping with their great size.

Like the men, they are clothed very scantily; but unlike the men, they seem to have no uniformity to the cut of their garments.

I was reminded of what I once heard a lecturer say about our own manner of head-dress.

He said, "In the matter of a hat, a man must wear something of a conventional shape and recognized style, if he wished to be well-dressed. But anything at all will do for a woman's hat. It can be any size, shape, color or material; and no one can say it is not a proper hat."

And so it is with these women. Some wear one kind of garment and some another; there is apparently no rhyme or reason to their manner of dress.

I asked Chunen if there were no established rules of society, governing what women ought or ought not to wear.

"Yes," he said, "there is a very definite rule in this matter; only the lighter colors are deemed suitable for feminine wear. For a woman to wear red, black or any of the dark colors is considered very immodest!"

I found the greenhouses to be marvels of productivity. They, of

course, are supplied with an abundance of steam heat, while the pale light of the sun is supplemented with strong artificial light, which seems to create abundant vegetable growth.

The greenhouses are largely given over to the raising of foodstuffs resembling celery, lettuce and such roughage. I saw but one plant that I recognized. That was maize, the common American corn. They raise this largely for fodder, only maturing enough for seed. The young shoots are used extensively in various salads and for fish food, while the more mature stalks constitute the major item of feed for the domestic animals, the ganos.

Upon visiting the little lake I had formerly noticed I found it stocked with large fish so numerous that the water seemed to be alive with them.

"We have a number of hatcheries," explained Chunen, "and the minnows are not put in here until they are nearly a year old. They are fed several times daily, so that they grow very rapidly. These fish are the property of the public, raised at government expense.

"Your see, we have such meagre facilities for raising meat and fish, and such difficulty in providing the people with anything approaching a balanced ration, that the public health demands that we have as large a production and as fair distribution as possible.

"Once a week a certain number of fish are taken out of the pond, and dressed by government employees.

"Then they are cut up in small pieces and a portion delivered free to every individual in the entire community.

"So, too, with meat. All animals are raised by government. Once a week a certain number are slaughtered and the flesh delivered to every home and public eating-place, according to the number of meals served.

"It is unlawful to sell or barter in any way in either of these products.

"In this way rich and poor alike are assured a fixed amount of fish and meat each week, enough at least to preserve health. It is presumed that mushrooms and vegetables are within the reach of all, and there is no restriction on their production and distribution.

"Tomorrow I will take you to see the domestic animals."

Ever since Chunen had first told me of the ganos, I had been impatient to see them. In the early morning I listened eagerly to my guide's discourse on the subject. I learned that the animals were quartered at the far end of the valley, beyond the farthest fumaroles. This part of the valley had formerly been enveloped in the ice, but because of the growing shortage of room, and because the animals seemed to flourish in a rather cool environment, the ice had been gradually melted away to make room for the ever-increasing herd. This end of the valley had been partitioned off to prevent the animal odor from drifting up the valley and had been roofed over with glass, supported by cables stretched from cliff to cliff.

The roof was rigged with a network of steam pipes, capable of melting snow very rapidly, so that in case of a great blizzard the roof would not become so loaded with snow as to be crushed, and so that

the glass might be kept free from frost, which would exclude the precious sunlight.

Upon entering this spacious structure, we found a group of the large animals immediately before the door.

Chunen had told me they were of great size, but I was not prepared to see anything so gigantic as these creatures proved to be. They were simply tremendous. They were taller than any elephant and several times as long! I could scarcely believe my eyes. It seemed absolutely impossible that there could be live animals of such colossal proportions.

They stood on four short legs. Their heads were long and ponderous, while their huge bodies tapered out in enormous tails that rested on the ground. In fact, their whole bodies scarcely cleared the ground as they moved ponderously about.

Their color was nearly black and they were covered all over with short, bristly hair.

An indefinable something about them suggested whales to my mind. I turned to question Chunen.

"Are these animals"—I was going to say mammals, but there was no word in his language with which I could express it—since they know of but one kind of animal they have no need of words to express classification.

He evidently sensed my predicament, for he smiled knowingly and led the way to another group of somewhat smaller animals.

"Are there no other kinds of animals in the valley? I asked. "No little ones of any kind?"

"There is a legend that a very long

time ago there were a great many kinds of animals, of all sizes and descriptions; but, so the legend goes, they ate the food the Steam God had provided for the people. This angered the Steam God, and he directed the priests to exterminate every kind of creature, except the ganos: which you see here.

"This legend, however, is quite generally believed to be only a fable; a figment of the imagination of some early story teller. Scientists have no definite proof that any other kind of animal ever lived here; unless you might call the ancestors of those ganos a different kind; for they have undergone quite noticeable changes within historic times. Careful selection and wise breeding have improved the stock, and are still improving it."

As we came up to the group of smaller animals, he continued:

"These, you will see, are young ones. They are, I should judge, about three years old. It takes them five years to reach a fair stage of maturity. That group over there is only a year old," pointing to another lot of very much smaller ones.

"The large ones that we saw over by the gate," he went on, "are to be butchered shortly. They will dress in the neighborhood of 79 gunitos apiece (Forty thousand pounds).

"We slaughter three of them a week. That provides something over one gito (an ounce) for each member of the community."

We came now to the breeding pens. One gigantic mother gano was suckling a litter of seven or eight great clumsy babies, that were scarcely a yard in length.

"So they are mammals," I thought

as I listened to Chunen's comments. We passed through another huge gate in one of the massive fences.

"I want you to see how they feed the animals," he was saying. "I think they are commencing now to feed the ones in the lower pens. We will go and see."

We found several great, power-driven conveyances drawn up beside an empty enclosure. A gang of workmen were unloading huge baskets, and emptying their contents into a series of shallow, ponderous troughs.

"That is their food," explained Chunen. "You will see it is largely made up of chopped corn stalks and giant mushrooms; although practically any kind of vegetable that we have to spare is acceptable. We also add a certain amount of coal, pulverized lime and various chemicals that have been found to be beneficial and conducive to growth.

"Now they are opening the gate to let the animals in."

The great creatures came lumbering in with ungainly and ponderous haste. But I was surprised to see that they attacked the food almost daintily; turning it over with their huge snouts, and picking out choice tidbits; taking up only a few handfuls at a bite.

"They cannot eat very rapidly," was the explanation. "Their throats are very small. Anyway, they don't have to be in a hurry. They have all the time there is. All they do is to eat.

"The community is put to tremendous expense to keep these animals," he went on. "We only get back one pound of meat for ten or a dozen pounds of feed. True, we use their droppings for fertilizer; but

even so, it seems like a very unfair exchange. But we are almost forced to do it, because it seems that some meat is necessary to balance our rations. Several times our herd of ganos has been attacked by disease to such an extent that the meat supply was nearly cut off. At such times our death rate has risen to appalling proportions."

As I watched the ganos feeding, the suggestion of whales still persisted.

Then I remembered that naturalists believe that prehistoric whales lived on land, and fed on vegetable growths; and that they only took to the sea at a comparatively recent time, geologically speaking.

In fact it is quite generally known that nearly all whales still possess the bones of vestigial legs, buried deep within the flesh. The forelegs have bones that are closely analogous to the arm and hand bones of human kind. Whales are mammals. They breathe air. They have movable eyelids, and in various other ways, I reasoned, are not far dissimilar to these animals.

Might it not be that these gigantic beasts were of the original whale family?

It was conceivable that a herd of these prehistoric animals had been living in this vicinity when the climate was still tropical or subtropical; and that some gradual change in the elevation of the earth's crust had cut them off in some marshy place, far from the sea. And that not having access to deep water, they had failed to develop the aquatic habits of the rest of their kind.

In that case, it was not altogether unreasonable to suppose that they

were of one and the same family as the hundred-foot whales of our northern seas.

That evening after visiting the ganos, we sat by a steam radiator in the laboratory and talked of many things.

"Have you no natural steam in your own country?" asked Chunen.

With such language as I had at my command, I told him very haltingly, and I fear, very ungrammatically, of the various steam valleys and fumaroles that I knew of, and how they had been harnessed for power. And then I attempted, with my pitifully inadequate vocabulary, to depict some of the beauties and wonders of Yellowstone National Park: the wild animals, the geologic formations, the hot springs, the steam vents; and ended with a description of the great geysers.

I told how Old Faithful erupted with clocklike regularity, year in and year out; and how one at least of the larger geysers would erupt only when soap was dumped into the caldron. A forbidden process.

At this information Chunen evinced an excited interest.

"Tell me that again," he said, leaning forward eagerly.

"Tell it again, and use more and better words!"

I told it again; cudgeling my brain for lucid words and descriptive phrases.

When I had finished, he leaped to his feet and towered over me like a Colosus. He gave me a mighty slap on the back with his great hand.

"That's the best thing you ever told me," he shouted in a jubilant voice that shook the frail instruments on the laboratory table.

"That secret is going to save your life!"

I was bewildered and dumfounded. I wondered how it could save my life. How was my life in danger?

He sat down opposite me again. "I will tell you all about it," he announced, becoming quite grave. "I would have told you before, but I knew you could not understand the details until you were somewhat familiar with the language; and besides, I was afraid that the knowledge would so distract you that it would interfere with your progress in learning to speak and write.

"For purely selfish reasons, as well as for the advancement of science, I desired to have you make all possible progress, in order to tell and write more fully of the extraordinary things of your world.

"But now I feel that the time is ripe and I will tell you all. If there is anything you do not understand, just interrupt and I will try to make it plain."

Then he told me of the peculiar religious beliefs of his people; explaining how I came to be a criminal; how I had been tried and condemned; how I had been sentenced to be thrown into the seething caldron of the temple geyser, on next sacrifice day.

I listened with mingled amazement and horror; interrupting often to make sure I understood correctly.

"But what has all this to do with the sleeping geyser that I have been telling you of?" I asked in some confusion.

"Yes, yes; I was coming to that," he replied. "This old caldron of ours has been known to erupt on rare oc-

casions, throwing water and mud and steam high in the air. It is supposed that on such occasions the Steam God is angry with his people, and that this is his way of showing his displeasure.

"Now, I strongly suspect that the same treatment that causes your geyser to erupt, would excite this one to activity. And I will show you how such an event might react to your benefit.

"I have been trying to think of some way to outwit the priests, ever since your arrival; but heretofore I had not been able to hit on a plan."

"You do not share in the religious beliefs of your race, then?" I queried.

"I know them for what they are; a mass of superstition," he replied emphatically.

"In fact, all our scientists know where the steam comes from, and how it is produced by the interior heat of the earth. We all know that steam is not a god, any more than the sun, the moon or the snow is a god.

"But knowing these things and getting the people to know them are two widely different matters.

"It would not be safe for me to even hint that I doubt the Steam God.

"As it is, the clergy are very suspicious of the scientists; fearing that they will try to undermine all religion. And the only way the real scientist can hope to be tolerated at all is by seeming to conform to the established religion."

"Yes," I rejoined, "history teaches that it has been so with the scientists of all countries and all ages. It has been an age-long battle against religion and superstition."

"Our religion has been gradually losing some of its barbarism, as we have been developing in civilization, and for the past few years there has been a growing revulsion of feeling against the making of a human sacrifice each year. Various subterfuges have been employed to appease popular discontent and still keep up the old ceremony, so time-honored and dear to the clergy.

"Two years ago a hopeless cripple was elected for the sacrifice; and last year an insane girl, given up by the doctors, was deemed sufficient for the Steam God.

"I believe the church feels that if they gave up this sacrificial custom, they will soon have to relinquish their hold on the sacred valley, which is sadly needed by our growing population, and which in the interest of progress and economy should have been made public property years ago.

"So the court was carrying water on both shoulders when it condemned you, a friendless criminal, to be the sacrifice. And he supposed he was making peace for another year between the clergy and the more advanced faction of our people.

"You being an unattached stranger, he reasoned that no one would object to your execution. At the same time, the clergy would feel that the law against visiting the sacred valley was being strictly enforced, and would be enabled to keep up their age-old custom of annual human sacrifice.

"But we shall see which is the more powerful, superstition or science. My plan is this: We will try to make some soap here in the laboratory, such as you use in your

country. We will test it out, and see if it will excite the Steam God. If we are successful, you will become religious. You can now talk a little to the priests and the people."

"Yes," I interjected; "a few weeks ago, I could have easily worshipped the Steam God!"

Chunen smiled and continued: "You will become converted to our religion, and wax very devout. Then——"

At that moment a squad of police entered the laboratory, much to our surprise and consternation. The officer in charge announced that it was the order of the court that I be delivered immediately to the jail, there to await execution.

He read an opinion of the judge, stating that the court was satisfied that my custodian was allowing me more liberty than was prudent in the case of one condemned to death.

Without further ceremony I was hustled away.

"Place your trust in the Steam God," Chunen called after me, as the laboratory door closed behind us.

I shall not dwell on the misery of the days that followed.

It wanted three weeks to the sacrifice day, and they were such weeks as I hope I may never again experience. I was again confined in the same little cell where I passed my first night in the valley. For a day or two I was too disheartened and terrified to plan any course of conduct. Then I remembered Chunen's parting words; and the feeling that I had an ally on the outside gave me a gleam of hope.

"Place your faith in the Steam God," he had said; and since I knew that he did not believe in that deity,

the admonition could have but one meaning: play the religious game.

I decided that playing a game, even if it should prove a losing game, would be far preferable to moping in craven fear.

Had I not taken my life in my hands, scorning to be daunted by the thought of death, when I started on this Arctic expedition?

Had I not overcome all obstacles with a stout heart and almost superhuman endurance, to reach this valley after the accident? Then why should I yield to this danger without a struggle? If courage and intelligence could overcome the power of the Arctic, why could they not triumph over the ignorance and superstition of an inferior race of people?

I resolved that like a true explorer, I would press forward with resolute heart and unfaltering purpose; and that I would not yield to the forces of adversity as long as there was a single possibility of winning through.

I asked the keeper who brought my food if he would ask a priest to come and see me. He readily consented to do so.

The following day a very old divine came to my cell.

I told him that Chunen had disclosed to me something of the greatness and goodness of the Steam God, and that I wanted to know more about him.

The old man appeared much pleased, and proceeded to teach me some of the rudiments of the religion.

I endeavored to show a deep interest and a devout attitude.

The following day, he brought another priest; apparently one of his superiors. They both assured me



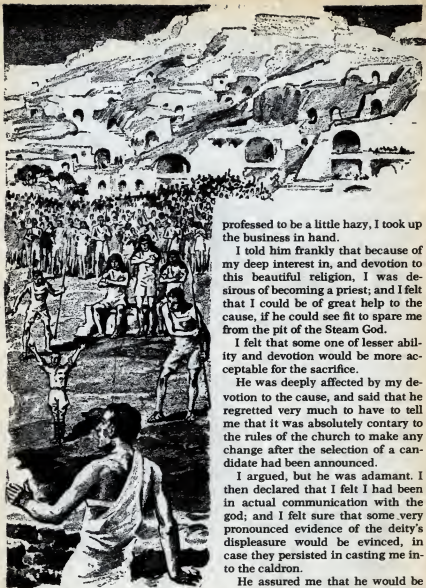
that the church was glad to know that I was a seeker after divine truth, and that every assistance would be given me to embrace a true worship of the Steam God.

Every day some member of the spiritual fraternity visited me and gave instruction. They brought me written matter explaining the ritual of their various ceremonies.

These I read as best I could, and committed much of them to memory. These were, indeed, busy days. At length, two days before the great event, I asked to see the chief priest; and was told that he planned to visit me on the day before the sacrifice.

I awaited his coming with considerable anxiety. He proved to be a very benevolent appearing old giant, and he greeted me very cordially.

After some discussion of certain phases of the religion, on which I



professed to be a little hazy, I took up the business in hand.

I told him frankly that because of my deep interest in, and devotion to this beautiful religion, I was desirous of becoming a priest; and I felt that I could be of great help to the cause, if he could see fit to spare me from the pit of the Steam God.

I felt that some one of lesser ability and devotion would be more acceptable for the sacrifice.

He was deeply affected by my devotion to the cause, and said that he regretted very much to have to tell me that it was absolutely contrary to the rules of the church to make any change after the selection of a candidate had been announced.

I argued, but he was adamant. I then declared that I felt I had been in actual communication with the god; and I felt sure that some very pronounced evidence of the deity's displeasure would be evinced, in case they persisted in casting me into the caldron.

He assured me that he would be on the alert for any such manifestation.

As he prepared to leave me, I sought one last favor from him.

I asked that I might have the opportunity to address a few words to the people assembled to witness the ceremony. I explained that I wished to affirm my faith in the Steam God, and to exhort them to hold fast to the faith of their fathers.

He consented to this very readily, and took his departure.

The morning of the sacrifice day arrived, and I had received no word from Chunen. I was deeply disappointed; for I feared that he had been arrested and thrown into prison. In that case I could hope for no help from him.

However, I knew that he was very prudent, and might suspect that the authorities were watching him and therefore had refrained from sending any message.

Two priests and two civil officers came at ten o'clock to take me to the temple caldron.

The climax of the ceremony was to be at high noon.

As we approached the holy place. I saw that a great crowd had already assembled, and were grouped about the quietly simmering caldron. At one side of the orifice, a place had been kept clear for the scene of the ceremonies. Into this clearing we made our way, and took seats on a stone bench, facing another similar bench on which were seated several dignitaries of the church, and also the judge who had sentenced me.

The seat being the proper height for these people of great stature, was so lofty that I had to hoist myself up to it; and as I sat there my feet dan-

gled in the air, while my escorts towered high on either side of me.

This circumstance, together with seeing hundreds of huge people all around me, gave me such a feeling of littleness and helplessness, that my courage descended to a very low ebb.

The chief priest now approached the center of the cleared space, and addressed the people. He was dressed in full regalia, and made a very impressive appearance.

After a brief address, he read several documents, the language of which was mostly above my head.

Then several boys appeared, bearing a small table and some articles of religious paraphernalia.

With the assistance of these, the priest proceeded to perform some rather weird incantations that to me seemed quite meaningless.

Meanwhile I scanned the faces of the crowd, hoping to see Chunen.

Presently I saw him, standing in the very front rank of the spectators that lined the opposite side of the caldron. Although he appeared to be looking directly at me, he failed to return my salute.

I noticed, however, that he carried a small parcel tucked under his arm. My attention was recalled to the master of ceremonies.

He sent away the boys with the table and other things, and four men appeared, Bearing by its four corners a large blanket. Evidently I was to be tossed from the blanket into the abyss. With the blanket stretched tight, they took their stand beside the cavity.

Then the priest told briefly how I had manifested a great interest in

religious matters, and said I had asked to be allowed to say a few words of parting to the public, and that I was now granted that privilege.

I scrambled down from my high seat, and assuming as much dignity as I could command, moved to the center of the arena.

Turning first, as a matter of courtesy, to address the dignitaries, I stole a glance at Chunen.

At that moment, he let the parcel slip from under his arm, and fall on the brink of the great bowl.

He made a quick movement, as if to recover it; and knocked it into the hole.

Although it was a very solemn occasion, those around him indulged in a bit of mild merriment at the mishap.

As I proceeded to speak, my voice seemed puny and thin as compared with that of the great priest who had just finished.

I said that on account of my lack of familiarity with the language, it would be possible for me to say but few words. I professed to be glad to serve the Steam God; and said that while I slept last night I had been in communication with him, and he had told me he did not desire that I be cast into the temple caldron; and that he was very much displeased with the ungrateful attitude of his people in offering a friendless stranger, instead of one of their own loved ones.

I paused impressively; and in the silence I heard a pronounced gurgle from the depths of the well!

"I have spoken," I concluded, very slowly and gravely.

"The Steam God will now speak to his people!" So saying, I turned about and approached the brink. By this time a cloud-like column of steam was arising; and an angry turmoil was plainly audible far below.

Standing close to the edge, with my arms stretched high above my head, I shouted frantically to the Steam God to speak louder.

A jet of steam and water leaped high in air. I turned and shouted to the people to retire to a safe distance, and motioned them to fall back.

In awe-struck silence they did so. And a moment later a vast column of water gushed from the earth and sprang skyward. A noise like the roll of thunder shook the narrow valley.

Having satisfied myself that all the crowd were at a safe distance, I turned to view the spectacle.

As I stood gazing at the grand upheaval, the surroundings faded from my consciousness; and I was standing once more, a callow youth, amid a group of gay tourists, watching Old Faithful do his stuff . . .

Many of the onlookers became panic-stricken and ran. But the priests and high officials stood their ground with calm dignity.

In a few minutes the disturbance subsided for the most part, and I again approached the still steaming hole.

With some hesitation the people, encouraged by the example of the priests and officials, returned.

The chief priest announced that the church would heed the protest of the god; and that on behalf of the clergy and the civil authorities, he took pleasure in extending to me the freedom of the valley.

Chunen came forward with beaming face and invited me to rejoin him at his home and laboratory.

This was in the month of March of the present year; I will touch but lightly on the months that have followed.

Suffice it to say that with the help of Chunen and a number of scientific societies, I succeeded in interesting the government in the wrecked airplane, in which I and the ill-fated Hadley had made our disastrous flight.

An expedition was organized and sent to bring in the wreck. After a great deal of difficulty this was accomplished.

With the assistance of mechanics and scientists, I set to work to duplicate the machine, and to produce a substitute for gasoline.

How well we succeeded in this may perhaps be best revealed by quoting the following extract from the *Tribune*:

"LOST EXPLORER RETURNS"

"Member of Artic Expedition Emerges from Frozen Wastes.

"An Associated Press dispatch from Prince Edward Island announced late yesterday that Arthur

Allen landed near the north coast of the island with his monoplane, from the Far North.

"Mr. Allen is the Photographer of the Kingsford Arctic Expedition. He left the base camp by plane in company with N. C. Hadley, on June 11, 1927. The plane was never heard from, and the fliers were given up as lost.

"Mr. Allen reports that the plane took fire early on the return trip. In the forced landing his companion was killed.

"The explorer then made his way on foot to a narrow valley in the midst of the ice fields, that was heated by natural steam issuing from a large number of fumaroles.

"Here he found a race of very large people, developing an isolated civilization.

"As proof of his statements, the intrepid explorer has brought back one of the giants with him.

"This robust specimen, who speaks no English and who dresses in a strikingly abbreviated costume, is over nine feet tall.

"Mr. Allen announced that he will make an extended report of his experiences on reaching New York."

The End.

The huge lock melted swiftly away under the combined attack of a half dozen flame pistols. Before its liquid metal had ceased dripping Bob was pushing through the gates.



ROADWAYS OF MARS

HARL VINCENT

Illustrated by LEO MOREY

Not a continuing series in the sense that the Professor Jameson stories are, Harl Vincent's "Martian Tales" had as their "hero" The Dry Lands of Mars—a place and a planet so preposing that only the hardiest of people could survive whether they be explorer, native, or indeed a villian such as Dingord—a man who needed no excuse for murder other than his own twisted impulse!

Chapter I Into the Drylands

SWERVING sharply from the main roadway along Canal Pyramus, the glistening nickel-cobalt surface of a narrow and seldom-used branch stretched out into the desert. Bob Coleman, leaning forward in his seat beside the Martian operator of the government ronsal, looked out over the smooth ribbon of metal that unrolled so swiftly beneath them.

"How much farther, Dako?" he asked.

"About six linis—hardly ten minutes of time as counted by your terrestrial chronometer." The coppery-skinned Martian replied in the respectful, unhurried drawl of his kind, but his pale eyes never left the roadway before them nor his hands the controls of the vehicle which sped through the thin air a few feet from the surface of the track.

They spoke in Sol-ido, the simplified tongue of twenty-first century interplanetary travelers. And the

words that had passed between them since leaving Risapar, capital of the Canal Cities Union of Mars, were few in number. Neither man was of talkative disposition.

Bob turned his head and gazed through the glass partition which separated them from the passenger compartment. With satisfaction he observed that his own men, eight in number and Americans all, were in cheerful spirits, though keenly regardful of the parched drylands that spread beneath the elevated roadway. The five Martian police officers who had accompanied them from Risapar, lolled in their cushioned chairs, somnolent, and with bronzed features relaxed. But Bob knew they could be relied upon in an emergency.

It was more than he had bargained for, this missionary jaunt into the most dangerous province of the drylands. But now he was in it, he would see the thing through to the finish. And who in his position would not? Taking the long rocket trip from the earth to Mars, he had

come as a free-lance, transportation engineer, worming his way into the confidence of the Canal Cities Council and obtaining a contract for the construction of two thousand miles of nickel-cobalt roadways into hitherto unserved territories. A nice fat contract it was, and highly lucrative. He had not seen the joker in it until it was too late to withdraw, even had he wished to do so. A joker that made of him first a propagandist, sending him into the far-flung arid lands, where he must convince the nearly savage natives of the benefits that must accrue to them with the coming of the lofty towers and their roadways of swift traffic.

An unprogressive and superstitious lot were these drylanders of Mars. Bleached of skin and uncouth of speech, they were a race unto themselves and dwelt in distrust and savage defiance of their more fortunate kin who lived in the fertile lands along the canals. There was warring continually between clans, and productive of many dangerous bands of marauders, whose depredations extended even to the greatest of the canal cities.

As the ronsal neared the end of the branch roadway, Bob turned again to the operator.

"Dako," he grinned, "There'll be thrills in this for us. We've spoiled our own world, overcivilizing it. Spoiled it for adventure, at least—there's none to be found there nowadays."

"You will find it without seeking in the drylands," the Martian drawled, "But it is not for me. I return with the ronsal."

Bob Coleman laughed. "You Mar-

tians are without romance," he observed. "You're too stoical and easy-going. Don't you ever get a kick out of anything?"

Dako turned pale but expressive eyes on him for the briefest instant, then shrugged his broad shoulders. "Hardly ever," he conceded. "It may be we have tired of the struggle. Or, possibly, the climate of our land has made us lethargic. And this is why you strenuous Americans have been so successful among us, commercially and in promoting engineering projects such as this."

"The bandit tribes of the drylands seem to have enough energy." This was sheer baiting of the operator and Bob cast a sidelong glance at him in anticipation of a protesting rejoinder.

But none came. Instead, the imperturbable Dako shrugged again. "You have heard from your brother?" he asked irrelevantly.

The American sobered. "Yes, by etherphone just before we left Risapar. Gordon is awaiting us at the terminus with pack animals and provisions, arms and ammunition—everything. Why do you ask?"

Dako made no reply. He was too busily engaged with his controls as the ronsal slowed down and came into the shed of the terminal station. When the tapered cylindrical vessel had ceased its forward motion, there was the soft throbbing of the atomic engines in the rear compartment. And they hovered there in midair an instant before the repelling energies of the charged nickel-cobalt roadway were neutralized by the ronsal's powerful force generators, then sank gently to the surface.

Here amongst the latticed towers at the end of the branch roadway sprawled the village of Tos-tanor, ostensibly under Union rule, but comprising a motley population of lawless outcasts of the canal cities. Beyond lay the powdery bleached sands of the desert.

Bob and his party came down from the roadway by way of the lift. Emerging from its cage in the waiting room of the station, they saw that the place was guarded by Union police and that a large crowd had gathered in the square outside.

"Looks like a reception committee," grinned Bob.

But Danny Matthews, his civil engineer, was solemn as he replied, "May be a hot reception, though. The cops are having some trouble keeping them in order out there."

What Danny said was true. An ominous muttering swept over the mob as the Terrestrians and their Risaparian guards pushed out to the railed balcony of the station.

Gordon Coleman was there on the balcony with his friend Kurt Davis and a low-caste bronze-skinned Martian. Faces looking up from the square, some coppery in hue, some ghastly white, were unfriendly and grimacing. Many drylanders had come in from the desert.

"It's all right, Bob," Gordon assured his older brother, gripping his arms in powerful raw-boned hands and looking into his face with black eyes alight with excitement, "Just as I told you. This little demonstration doesn't mean a thing. Our jikiris—the tough little burros of the drylands, you know—are just outside the town. Arms, supplies, and

all are ready. And Zeranu here——" He thrust forward the shifty-eyed Martian who was with him. "——Zeranu will interpret for us so the drylanders will get it all. Better talk to them, Bob."

"Gordon." Bob's keen eyes looked into those flashing black ones that were level with his own. "You've been lying to me. Hell is brewing out here and you know it. You've been hurt, too."

"Oh, that." Gordon Coleman laughed as he caressed the surgical dressing that extended from the angle of his jaw up back of his ear and over several inches of scalp. He tossed back his mane of black hair and hooted disdainfully. "Nothing but a scratch. And I didn't lie, Bob, I didn't. This mob'll listen. When you tell 'em, they will. Go on now, give 'em the works."

Pride was in the youngster's voice and utter confidence in the spell-binding ability of the brother he had looked up to since his earliest remembrance. But underneath his care-free assurance was a jerkiness and nervous uncertainty he could not hide from Bob.

"Gordon——" the older man gulped.

"Do as he says," hissed Danny Matthews, interrupting.

"Yes, you've got to," Kurt Davis put in, "They're waiting."

A hush had come over the crowd, whether threatening or merely expectant they had no means of knowing. The local police and those from Risapar were stolidly watchful.

"All right." Suddenly decided, Bob Coleman grasped the skinny biceps of the interpreter. "Tell them,

Zeranu," he snapped, "that I wish to address them, that you'll translate."

The shrill chattering of the outcast Martian cut into the twilight. Utter silence greeted his words, the rabble was indeed waiting.

Bob spoke then without preamble. "This thing we are doing," he told them, "will bring prosperity and new opportunity to the drylands. It will carry to the remotest province the advantages of the canal city dweller. Pipe lines will come with the roadway; there will be water to increase the the fertility of your lands. A closer understanding will arise between the races."

He paused while Zeranu translated rapidly. A bellowing voice answered from out the rabble—gibberings in the dryland tongue

"What did he say?" growled Bob.

"Him say," in halting Solido from the interpreter, "that devils of fire live on top towers. Imps of flame dance in darkness."

Bob chuckled appreciatively, having seen the eerie corona discharge of the nickel-cobalt roadways by night. Again he raised his voice—"There are no devils; it is merely a force like that which lights the cities. No—it is more like the natural force which causes a body to fall to the ground excepting that it works in the reverse direction. It is harmless, only lifting the cars from the roadway so they may be driven speedily on their way with only the friction of the air to hold them back. We are unharmed, we who have ridden—"

"It's too deep for them," husked Gordon, at his side. "Try another line, Bob."

But Zeranu was chattering importantly, explaining to the mob. A murmur of amazement and indicating some degree of understanding swept across the square. Outcasts from the cities were confirming the words of this Terrestrial in swift mouthings addressed to the drylanders with whom they rubbed elbows.

And then a hideous uproar came up from the far side of the square. Charging down one of the narrow streets was a group of riders led by a huge bearded drylander. At the swift clattering of jikiris' hoofs the mob broke up, panic-stricken and screaming as they crowded into the nearby dwellings and fought to escape through the constricted, cobble paved alleyways. The local police stood their ground until spouting white flame from the riders' pistols put them to rout. The Risaparian officers, better trained and of greater courage, went into the fray undaunted and with riot-pistols roaring.

"It's Bingord, Bob," Gordon was yelling, "Quick, down through the station and out behind. Here's a flame pistol."

With the cold metal butt of the weapon in his fingers, Bob wanted to fight it out with the bandits. But Gordon pulled at him frantically and the others urged him to retreat.

"They're too many for us," his brother panted as they ran through the darkening and deserted station, "And Bingord is the toughest bandit in these parts. We are not all armed, either—not yet."

Outside the station, they were carried along in a howling, fleeing rabble. Gordon pushed on ahead,

flinging aside those who obstructed his path, as if they had been ninepins. A rider swung in out of a side street and white flame streaked out toward the bobbing, black head of the sprinting youngster. A miss. Bob shot down the bandit, shouting to Gordon as the raider's one blast splashed harmlessly against a wall.

"Stay with us boy," he yelled. "We've more chance together."

"I'll get him," Kurt Davis grunted, forging ahead through the jam. "We'll make the camp all right. It's just outside town at the end of this street. Hurry——"

Then both youngsters were gone and the nine Terrestrians with Bob Coleman at their head were battling their way past steaming, filthy creatures who ran and fought and screeched unceasingly. It was a bedlam, a horrible endless dream. The short Martian twilight deepened abruptly into night. And over it all rose the crackling roar of flame pistols and the hoarse shouts of the raiding bandits.

Danny Matthews was at Bob's side, driving piston-like punches into leering faces that loomed up before him. Trampling the limp bodies that slumped to the pavement under his blows. And the rest of the Terrestrians, yelping their defiance, were close behind.

Stumbling, panting, groping in the darkness, they came out of the narrow lane. Abruptly they were in the desert where the sands gleamed whitely in the starlight. The darkness was shot with stabbing shafts of light over to the left where there was a blur of dark forms. And the shouts of battling humans mingled with the crackling of flame pistols and the

doglike yapping of jikiris. A clattering of many hoofs was trailing off into the night. Silence then, save for the hubbub in the village which was gradually subsiding behind them.

"The devil!" roared Bob, "It's our outfit. The bandits—that's why Gordon went on ahead. Come on, men."

"May be they're safe," Danny Matthews tried to tell him.

But Bob hardly heard. "Gordon!" he called out again and again. And swift terror clutched at his heart.

A voice replied unintelligibly, and then he had stumbled over a dark form that showed dimly against the white sands. Jikiris stamped and yapped close by.

Danny and Bob were on their knees when the rest of the party closed in around them. It was Kurt Davis who lay there, with half his chest seared away by the white flame of a bandit's pistol, his clothing charred and smouldering over the horrible injury.

"Bob," he whispered, "They—got him—got Gordon——"

"Killed him?" An unrecognizable voice came from the big American who knelt there, a voice fraught with misery and cold with the promise of vengeance. Bob Coleman's voice and yet that of a stranger.

Danny Matthews' teeth chattered. Bob heard them distinctly.

"No." Kurt Davis moaned and his voice quavered off into silence. The watchers were sure he had gone. Then, weakly—"Bingord rode off with him—kidnaped him, Bob—he——"

A rattling cough, a last effort to speak and the dark form lay still. Bob Coleman bared his head to the

Martian sky as he rose to his feet. Danny Matthews cursed softly but with deadly earnestness.

Chapter II Bingord's Trail

Phobos, inner satellite of Mars, rose swiftly above the western horizon, casting long black shadows of the tethered jikiris. Though much smaller and less bright than earth's moon, the illuminated body was in full phase and proved a vast improvement on the faint light of the stars. But the drylands ahead were empty of life, mysterious. And the village behind was a dark smear against the sky, a sprawling blot where a few lights flickered and ominous silence reigned.

Other corpses were here in the white sand, three in all. One was that of the Martian youth whom Gordon had hired as a guide; two were bandits. Resistance had not been altogether futile.

The Americans were among the jikiris, soothing the excited beasts with gruff, friendly words and fingers that stroked the sleek bullet-shaped heads.

"Nothing missing here," Danny Matthews announced. "At least they left us our animals and supplies. Wonder how come."

"Yeah, it's queer. And why the capture of Gordon—beating it so quickly with him?" Mystified by the bandits' tactics and undecided as to the next move called for, Bob was examining the trappings of the jikiris. "Ten with light packs and saddles," he muttered, "and two loaded to the guards. Good job the boy did."

"What do we do now?" asked Danny.

"We'll get them—get Gordon." Bob raised his voice in sudden decision: "All right, men, choose your mounts and make sure your flame pistols are in their saddle holsters. We ride tonight."

"With no guide?" one of the men objected.

"Ought to be plenty of guides in Tos-tanor. We'll go back and take one on." Bob had singled out a lively jikiri and was astride him as he spoke.

"No need hunt guide in village. She's all locked up in houses, afraid from Bingord," a scornful voice spoke out of the shadows.

"Zeranu!" Bob wheeled in his saddle and stared down into a pair of beady eyes that flashed bright in the light of Phobos.

"Yes, Zeranu follow. Know Bingord come out from village to get young Gordon. Know many things. Zeranu will show way to dryland devil place where Bingord live."

"You're hired, if you can do this," exulted Bob, "but——" hesitating, "why are you so anxious for the job?"

The beady eyes were eloquent with hate. "Zeranu wait long time for this chance," the wizened Martian snarled, "Long years wait since Bingord kill Zeranu's woman. Now men from green star come and see; kill Bingord. We go?"

Bob Coleman whistled. There was no doubting the outcast's sincerity; the cracked voice bespoke undying ferocity born of his wrong, and eager assurance.

"You bet we go—now." Pressing

knees to the sides of his restless mount, Bob was off into the desert. "Come on Danny. Come on you fellows that wanted action!"

Zeranu was in saddle and alongside in a flash, the rest of the outfit straggling after them as they rode.

"Not too quick, boss," the Martian advised, "We ride long time. And must go more to right. See, the way marked by great star there."

Bob's gaze followed the pointing finger and he marveled at the brilliance of the body as seen through the thin atmosphere of the red planet.

All that night they rode across the ghostly sands, and Zeranu talked incessantly. Prompted occasionally by a word of interrogation from the big American at his side, he related strange legends of the pale and dark races of Mars and stranger facts concerning the existing feeling between them. He enlarged upon his own family history and told of Bingord's systematic terrorization of the three provinces that lay in the line of the proposed roadway extension. The story of the downfall of the Canal Cities Empire and of the rise of the Union was his chief interest, and the many superstitions of the drylands his great delight. There seemed to be no fear in the scrawny Martian. And it was increasingly evident that he had not idly boasted of knowing many things.

Bingord, it developed, was a bandit extraordinary. A half-breed, born of an exiled princess of the old Empire and a giant dryland rover, he had been educated in the universities of Risapar. Acquiring thus a bitter hatred of the favored city

dwellers and a deep contempt of the untutored drylanders, he had established himself as a foe of both races. And his stronghold in the lava beds of the first province was a place of terror to all who knew of its existence. To the chalky-skinned natives it was known as an abode of devils and of black magic; to such city dwellers, who had been reached by the long arm of Bingord, it was a fortress of ultra-modern defenses, where fiendish devices of torture were used on the hapless victims of the bandit.

It was Bingord who fought the coming of the nickel-cobalt roadway, for well he knew that his dominance of the three provinces was at stake. And, by his reign of terror in the dryland villages, he had thus far succeeded in maintaining the stubborn resistance of the natives.

The raid on Tos-tanor and the rioting there had been a sample of Bingord's methods. Only here there was a deeper motive. Heretofore all representatives of the Union Roadways System had been politicians or engineers from the cities and consequently were easy to deal with. Now it was a different matter with the aggressive humans from the green star, the earth, in his dominion. And the young Gordon had learned too much during the days of his sojourn in the drylands. That was one thing. Still more important to Bingord than this was his value as a hostage and a bait for the luring of the entire party of Terrestrians to destruction. Thus had the attack on Tos-tanor been planned and timed. Its double purpose was plainly apparent.

In the deliberations of the Council of Risapar the true facts were ignored, Zeranu declared. Perhaps, even, the councilors had not been able to learn of the real conditions, since the drylanders are stubborn and close-mouthed. And properly so, for they are too fearful of the might and the magic of Bingord to risk a betrayal. Zeranu, dwelling amongst them for nearly a generation, had learned these things. He *knew* but was not afraid.

Only to rid the provinces of the scourge of this Bingord and all would be well, he avered. No further difficulties then with the natives. Most gladly, instead, they would hail the men from the green star as their deliverers. And they would be most reasonable in permitting the construction of the long-fought extension of the roadway through their territory.

Bob Coleman believed the ancient Martian. And, believing, he was appalled at the prospect. Chill forebodings assailed him as he came to realize fully the position of his younger brother.

"What makes you believe we can succeed against this terror of the drylands?" he asked his informant, when they had ridden for some time in silence.

"Your kind never fail." There was quiet confidence in Zeranu's reply. "Much more brave and strong as any Martian. More quick in brain also. You see."

"Hmph. Wish I were as sure of that as you are."

The first faint light of dawn was painting the sky when Bob called for a halt. They had ridden steadily and far. On such a ride the muscles of

men not lately accustomed to the saddle become cramped and sore, their joints stiffened. Besides, the jikiris needed a rest—and water.

He slipped easily to the white sands, mindful of the fact that a Terrestrial must move lazily in this gravity that reduced his bodily weight by nearly two-thirds. Breathing deeply in the rare air which never fully satisfied earthly lungs, he stretched mightily. A steely glitter was in his blue-gray eyes as he looked out over the drylands and bleak lines came into his face with the compressing of his lips. No cheering prospect was presented by the view.

His men, weary but in good spirits, were rummaging in the packs for food and unslinging water bags from the jikiris. Danny Matthews' broad grin was in evidence as the daylight revealed him as something more than a shadowy form. His gaze was upon Zeranu, admiringly.

"The old boy sure can spin a yarn," he said to Bob in English.

"Did you hear it all?"

"Mostly, I guess. And he gave me the creeps sometimes."

"What do you think, Danny?"

"I think we've got a large order—smoking out this Bingord. And I hope Zeranu's on the level. If he isn't we're sunk."

Their guide broke forth in a torrent of expostulation, waving his skinny arms and shaking his head until the long hair nearly hid his wrinkled, leathery countenance. "Zeranu spik your Inglis same like Sol-ido," he clucked. "And Zeranu not lie. Take you to Bingord now—before half day. You see."

"Inglis!" Danny grinned, "Better stick to Sol-ido, old boy."

"Lay off of him," growled Bob, "This is a real jam we're in; can't you get it through your head? Gordon's out there and——"

"I know Bob. Sorry." The young engineer sobered instantly. Then, turning to the muttering guide—"Don't mind me, Zeranu. I'm always this way. But I'll be Johnny-on-the-spot when you show us where to find this bad man of the desert."

Zeranu blinked rapidly, understanding only a part of the speech. But his swarthy face relaxed once more into its accustomed impassivity. No one, not even an out-cast Martian, could long harbor resentment against Danny Matthews.

After that came the business of eating and of apportioning the limited allowance of water to man and beast. Conversation was lacking as the meal was wolfed down. And, in a very short time the jikiri train was again in motion.

The character of the drylands changed as the tireless little animals plodded onward. Where at first there had been only the level monotony of the powdery white sands, outcroppings of volcanic rock now showed here and there. And a range of low hills loomed up before them. Within three hours of daybreak they had left the sandy plain far behind and the jikiris were picking their way sure-footedly through a torn and broken area where their progress was impeded by tumbled masses of spongy stone, bleached to chalky whiteness as had been the sands.

Coming out through a narrow gorge they saw a fertile spot. A tiny

dryland village nestling amidst the dwarfed purple brush that marked the location of a water hole.

"Not far now," Zeranu grunted when they neared the settlement. "Fill water bags here, Boss. Then go to Bingord—quick."

A group of excited villagers greeted them when they rode in among the collection of rude huts. In their midst lay a horribly seared and mutilated native, his body mourned over by a sobbing woman. Zeranu dismounted and chattered earnestly with a red-bearded drylander who seemed to be the spokesman of his clan.

"Him say," he translated rapidly to Bob, "Bingord here not long after sun come up. With five, six, nine men. And the young Gordon bleeding. Tied up on jikiri's back. Man on ground here try help him escape. Bingord slay foolish drylander before go. Beat the young Gordon with pistol until fall down. Sol!"

Wrathfully Zeranu switched from the Sol-ido into a gibbering of Martian invective.

Slowly the color drained from Bob's face, leaving it an ashy gray. His lean jaw tightened in grim lines. But no words came from his thin lips; he only beckoned to his men to make haste at the water hole.

Chapter III Repulse

From what Zeranu had said, Bingord's stronghold was to be found in a most inaccessible location. It was a walled village on an elevated site, with the only approach across broken lava beds that were almost impassable. And certainly, as they pro-

gressed, the way was becoming increasingly difficult. The jikiri train, at times, skirted the crumbling rims of yawning chasms where the slip of a hoof meant swift death to beast and rider. At other times the riders were forced to dismount and lead their tired animals through tortuous, arched-over crevasses that hardly provided sufficient clearance for the packs.

Fervently Bob wished for a plane or a helicopter. An impossible wish here on the red planet, where the nickel-cobalt roadways were the sole arteries of rapid transportation. Not that the dwellers of the canal cities had progressed insufficiently along scientific lines to develop air travel; it was merely that ships of the air were at a great disadvantage due to the rarity of the atmosphere and the extreme thinness of the layer surrounding the globe. An unsound proposition economically, for huge wing-surface and tremendous power would be required in climbing only a few hundred feet. Hence the roadway of Mars.

Still he could not but think of the advantage that would be theirs now, had they a swift plane at their disposal. Digging his unspurred heels into the flanks of his jikiri, he pulled up beside Zeranu. More than two hours had passed since they left the water hole back there and he had an idea they were nearing their destination.

"Are we nearly there?" he asked the guide.

For answer Zeranu extended a skinny forefinger. From behind a low ridge not a thousand yards away a column of black smoke curled sky-

ward. Unmistakable signs of human habitation.

The sight gave Bob pause. "Pretty close by," he muttered. "Can we approach without being seen?"

"Yes, boss, Zeranu know how. Around end of hill can see place. But we go in cracks of stone, so Bingord not can see us. Wait."

"Hm. How many men in the band?"

"Not many. Maybe twenty, maybe fifty—who knows?" The Martian shrugged his scrawny shoulders. To these superior beings from the green star it should make little difference what the odds were.

They came through a defile that split the end of the ridge. A well-worn path branched off here in the direction of the bandit's lair, but Zeranu drove his jikiri down into a dark crevasse that went deep into the spongy lava bed in the opposite direction. For an instant Bob caught a glimpse of the stronghold, an impregnable position, it seemed, on a rocky prominence not more than a half mile distant.

"Not so good," commented Danny Matthews, "How in the devil we're going to get to them I don't know."

"Zeranu know." The Martian was unfazed by the prospect. "We come in very close so can shoot. They not see us. Zeranu know way."

"I hope so." Danny was dubious. "What's your plan, Bob?"

"Well, we can't use the torpedo projectors on account of Gordon. We could wipe them out from here if they didn't have him. Guess our best bet is to use the tear gas if we can get near enough to toss our grenades. That's my idea, at least."

"We get close," Zeranu assured them, "Bingord not can find us in cracks of stone. Zeranu know every crack."

"The old boy's been scouting around here for years," chuckled Danny. "Guess we can trust him."

They were in a veritable labyrinth of fissures, some rising nearly to the surface and others dropping rapidly to depths of fifty feet or more. At one point Bob was able to raise himself and look out over the lava bed. He saw that they had covered more than half the distance to the stronghold.

As he dropped back into his saddle a great voice rolled out over the valley. A Brobdingnagian voice, that reverberated through the passages and smote upon their eardrums with deafening power. A voice that was hideously raucous—metallic. And it brought understandable words to the astounded hearers. Words in the Sol-ido tongue.

"Make haste, Americans," it sneered thunderously, "Bingord awaits your coming with keen anticipation."

There was silence then save for the echoes that came back from the low hills. Zeranu wheeled in his saddle and a twisted grin contorted his narrow features.

"Drylanders say this magic," he cackled. "But we know it machine talk of Bingord. Big horn make noise but not scare us. So?"

"It means we've been seen though." Bub pulled up his jikiri and stood in the saddle, drawing himself to the edge of the crevasse. No sign of life was there at the bandit's fortress.

He had known instantly that the

great voice was a human one, enormously amplified by electric means. Nevertheless it had awed him by its vastness and had silenced his men; it was no wonder the drylanders shunned this place. And most disturbing was the knowledge it brought that the enemy knew of their approach, and the certainty that Bingord was equipped with the most modern of devices.

Zeranu's expression was not as confident as it had been. "Maybe they come out with flame pistols," he offered.

"Or cannons," grunted Danny Matthews. "Afraid we'll have to rush the joint, Bob."

"That would be suicide. No Dan, we'll go on and try the gas."

"How about loading a torpedo with the stuff and shooting it over?"

"We could do that." Bob pondered this as they pushed forward. "But I'd be afraid of it Danny. The bursting charge would have to be quite powerful and we don't know about Gordon. Might hit him."

The way dropped sharply into a roofed cavern where they were in near darkness.

"Come close now," whispered Zeranu, "When come out of cave be right under wall. Throw gas bombs then."

"All right, fellows," Bob called out softly, "All get set with a grenade apiece. When I give the word, we'll fling them over the wall. Then rush the entrance. They'll be blinded and helpless."

"So?" Startlingly, the great voice of the amplifier echoed in the cavern. "Come out into the light, men from the green star,

that Bingord may welcome you fittingly."

Whereupon the voice laughed hideously—mockingly.

Zeranu's mount backed frantically into Bob's and there was an instant confusion in the cavern. The jikiris yapped their alarm and the oaths of the Americans mingled with their mouthings.

"Come on!" yelled Bob. "He's trying to scare us off like a pack of ignorant drylanders. Come on—one, two, thr——"

At the count of three he was in the open air, his arm drawn back with the egg-shaped grenade gripped tightly in his fingers. Danny and Zeranu were off their jikiris and at his side in a flash. The others were not far behind. And over them loomed the smooth wall of the bandit's stronghold.

But the gas bombs were never thrown. Zeranu's shrill yelp cut the air like a knife and he dropped the grenade Bob had handed to him.

"Hells bells!" roared Danny Matthews. "It's hot." His own missile flung out in a puerile arc, sputtering to a white heat as it left his hand.

Too astonished to release his grenade at once, Bob suffered severe burns before opening his fingers. And he watched in amazement as the metal casing with its charge of tear gas disintegrated into complete nothingness at his feet.

"Lord!" he groaned, "They're broadcasting some energy that disrupts the atoms. Go back, fellows, back into the cavern!"

They had not heeded his command and were crowding into the semi-darkness. Shouts and curses

echoed in the enclosure. His men were as demoralized as were the jikiris.

And over all boomed the mighty laughter of Bingord's amplifier.

"What's wrong with you fellows?" Bob roared, recovering his equanimity and boiling with sudden wild rage, "Are you afraid of these cute tricks? Come on now—after me! We'll rush the gates with flame pistols."

The butt of his weapon was in his hand as he rushed out in to the open. Zeranu tried to restrain him but his own men streamed out after him, anxious to do battle and heedless of the consequences.

But no enemy appeared at the double gate. There was no living being in sight on which to direct the spouting white flame of their weapons. A huge rusty lock secured the entrance and Bob was struck with an idea at the sight of it.

"All together, fellows," he whispered hoarsely, "Aim at the lock. We'll melt it away."

Nine flame pistols were raised and nine incandescent blasts shot forth. But they never reached their mark for the disintegrating force smote out from behind the wall. Soundlessly, invisibly, yet heating the metal of the weapons so swiftly that flesh was seared in the discarding of them. Some of the pistols vanished in puffs of vapor ere they reached the ground. And again came the thunderous laughter of the bandit's amplifiers.

"Devil take him!" shouted Bob. "He beats us at every move. Why doesn't he come out and fight?"

He raised his voice to the blank

wall in furious challenge, but the maniacal laughter of the giant voice drowned out his words.

"Better go back and talk it over," Danny suggested, ruefully nursing a scorched palm. "This Bingord knows a few tricks. He's too many for us—so far."

"Yes," Bob admitted grudgingly, "We'll have to figure out a bit of strategy, I guess."

They retired to the cavern where Zeranu awaited them with a long face.

"Zeranu try to tell you," he accused Bob. "No good for go out now. Bingord got seeing machine somewhere—know what we do. Must wait for dark. Then throw gas bombs."

"Nothing doing," chagrined though he was by this first failure, Bob Coleman had been goaded to stubborn determination by the sardonic, giant voice that was everywhere about them. He was in no mood to consider further delay. And his men were of like mind. "We'll have to attack at several points," he growled, "That's the only way we can put this across. What's your idea, Danny?"

"Same as yours. And, listen: suppose I take six of the men and the animals and strike out through the crevasses to make an attack from the rear. They'll think we've all gone. You wait here and when you hear the explosion of a torpedo, you can charge the gates. I'll fire on the base of the wall back there with a projector and it'll probably blow a hole through it at the same time. We can——"

"A good idea, Danny. Let's go."

"No, no!" their guide expostulated shrilly, "Zeranu not know way to rear. Drylanders say much black magic that way. You not live to reach back wall. Must think other way to do."

"Nonsense." For the first time Bob was impatient with the old outcast. "You're believing some of this native superstition. We'll break up as Danny suggests."

"Can't do," wailed Zeranu, "Lose men, animals, everything. You see. Not black magic but machines of Bingord kill. Can't do."

"Shut up!" Bob roared at the cringing Martian. Then swiftly to his men—"You Phillips and Morey—stay here with Zeranu and me. And here, Danny—just a second—leave us grenades and new flame pistols. You take the rest. Take all the jikiris and make as much noise as you want getting started. The four of us here will keep hidden until we hear your shot. Better make it two torpedoes in quick succession so we'll be sure it's you. Beat it now."

In the half light Zeranu's leathery countenance was a tragic mask. But he forebore the offering of further objection. Gleelessly singing out his orders, Danny Matthews led his little party off through a branching passageway that paralleled the wall.

Chapter IV Black Magic

The four men, huddled into the darkest recess of the cavern, kept strict silence while they waited breathlessly for Danny's signal. A half hour passed without sound, when Bob could stand it no longer.

"Must have reached it by this time," he muttered huskily.

"Hush—maybe hearing machine in cave," Zeranu whispered in his ear, "Not time yet—pretty soon."

Three quarters of an hour and still no signal. The silence was uncanny; there was not even the faintest sound from behind the wall of the fortress. Bob fidgeted but held his peace.

One hour. Bob Coleman held his watch before him now and its illuminated dial was an eery flickering thing in the darkness as it fluttered in his trembling fingers. The strain was telling.

And then a ghastly sound came to their ears. The shriek of a man in mortal agony. Whether it came from within the wall or from the rear, they could not determine. But it was the voice of an American, that was certain. And immediately after it came the crazy laughter of the blasting amplifiers.

"That settles it." Bob leaped to his feet and his heart was heavy within him. "They've got Danny and the rest," he said tonelessly. "They must have, or we'd have heard those torpedoes. Come on fellows, we'll have to go after them."

He was thankful that Zeranu had no "I told you so," with which to reproach him. Instead, the scrawny outcast clucked sympathetically and ducked into the branch passage after him. Phillips and Morey spoke no word as they followed.

The passage widened out and soon the pale green of the sky was above them. This was a sizeable gorge they were traversing and the going here was easier than they had

found it since entering the lava beds. They had gone but a little way when the nature of the spongy walls changed; they smoothed out, as if cut through the lava by the hand of man. And the depth of this channel was not more than ten feet.

Presently they entered a circular well of similar depth. And from it radiated no less than a dozen cleanly cut passages. They were in a cleverly conceived maze of human—or inhuman—origin.

From this point they could see the wall of the stronghold. And it still presented a blank expanse of smooth stone. Forbidding. Unmarked by the presence or nearness of any living thing.

"This what Bingord want us to do," Zeranu observed sagely, "Not come out to fight because expect him lead us here where most good for he self. Not good for we."

"Looks like you're right," Bob admitted ruefully, "And I'll be damned if I know which way to go now."

"Why not call out to Danny?" whispered the lad called Morey, "The bandits probably know we're here anyway."

It was not necessary to follow the suggestion however, because a second hideous shriek rent the air at that instant. And there was no mistaking the direction from which the sound came, for it rang out from one of the smooth passages as if carried through a speaking tube.

Without hesitation Bob dove into the smooth-walled channel, and the others were hard on his heels. A bedlam of frightened sound was in their ears as they ran. Blasting laughter that beat at the eardrums and smote

their cheeks with a distinct sensation of vibration of the air around them.

Abruptly they debouched into a walled-in rectangle. And the sight that greeted them sent Bob Coleman back on his heels.

A faint mist of rosy hue was in this place, a mist that lay in two pulsating strata, one shoulder high, the other close to the ground. Danny and the rest of the party were here, but scarcely recognizable in the frenzy that had come upon them. the jikiris were stamping and pawing frantically, without uttering a single plaintive yap. And two of the men were down, bleeding from horrible wounds. They had been trampled by the mad jikiris, or had killed themselves in the insanity that was brought on by some diabolical energy with which Bingord was charging the whole of the area.

Danny Matthews, his face bloated to incredible size and his eyes popping from their sockets, was babbling hoarsely, almost inaudibly. Pointing to the wall of the bandit's stronghold. Unconsciously, Bob's gaze followed his finger and he thought he saw a misty shape atop the wall. A huge shadowy form; weaving in the weak sunlight. He rubbed his eyes and it had vanished.

Another of the men—Glenn Thomas—went stark mad and staggered to one of the jikiris, beating at the round head of the bucking animal with clubbed flame pistol. Bob went after him, bellowing. Dragged him from the foam-flecked creature before he had killed it.

And then he too was smitten by the weird force that had the rest in

its throes. His vision was distorted and there came a pounding at the innermost cells of his brain that drove all sane thought from his mind. Up there on the wall was a monstrous grinning figure, swaying in the breeze. A solid figure, of flesh and blood, yet fully fifty feet tall, a colossal reproduction of the bearded bandit, Bingord, in the flesh, grinning evilly. Gloating. Bob tried to cry out, but no sound came from his parched lips.

One of the jikiris flung itself against him in its frenzy, catapulting him to the wall of the arena. The shock cleared his brain slightly. And suddenly he knew that this energy emanated from the very walls about them. He had seen two metal strips there, one close to the ground, the other shoulder high. Desperately he fought to retain his senses as the radiation beat at him anew.

Groping—for the rosy mist was thickening—he found his way to Danny. Shook him mightily. But Danny only stared with those popping eyes, and gibbered through swollen lips, with horrible sounds that scarcely could be heard. Great purple veins stood out in his forehead.

Another shriek rang out—and another. Two of the men were in violent conflict, battering out each other's brains with their pistol butts, wallowing in their own blood as they rolled over and over on the hard ground. And the laughter thundered from the widespread mouth of that inhuman giant top the fortress wall.

Bob must have gone completely mad for a moment after that, for the

next he knew he had wrestled a jikiri into submission and was pawing through its pack for a torpedo projector. Insane laughter would have come from his lips had he been able to open them. And then he was fondling the long slim tube of the projector, withdrawing the plug of the generating mechanism in the stock. The whirl of the generator inside was a welcome sound above the roaring that was in his ears.

Crazily he backed to the wall and leveled the weapon at the impossible figure of Bingord. The colossus swayed and grinned as before, but now its bloodshot eyes were directed at the puny being down there, who dared to think he might prevail against his might. In a daze, Bob saw Zeranu endeavoring to scale the wall; saw him batter his head against the unyielding stone in a frenzy. He hardly knew he had pulled the release of the torpedo projector; would not have known it had not the spang of its propelling ray penetrated his consciousness. And the torpedo, with its deadly charge of ultranite, sped on *through* the monster on the wall. Out past the rosy mist he saw its leisurely arc as it rose and fell into the lava bed, far beyond the stronghold of the bandits. The sound of a terrific explosion, harmlessly expended, and the raucous laughter of the unharmed monster on the wall were all the reward he had for his pains.

The drylanders were right. This *was* a place of black magic, after all. A jikiri, enormously enlarged in Bob's vision, charged him and drove him against the wall. With arms

flailing mechanically but effectively, he flung the crazed animal off.

Behind him there came a brilliant flash and the torpedo projector was almost wrenched from his grasp. It had contacted with the two horizontal strips of metal along the wall and the short circuit heated the tube noticeably. A second flash followed as he pulled the weapon away, but his senses were too far gone to permit of the significance of the phenomenon impressing him at the time.

Looking out beyond the pulsating rosiness of the mist, he saw that a new and different figure had appeared on the wall of the fortress. As huge as the figure of Bingord had been and apparently as real. But this one—it was incredible—this was Gordon! Gordon Coleman, tied fast to a metal grid, his face contorted in unspeakable agony. They were torturing him—torturing—torturing Gordon by some devilish means that involved a flashing display of pyrotechnics which penetrated his body in emanations from the latticed metal behind.

Something snapped then in Bob's harrowed brain. He flung himself at the wall of the pit, deliberately shortcircuiting the two glowing strips with the tube of his projector. As before, there was the violent flash and the tube became warm in his hands. He released his grip of it and it clung there, heating rapidly to a cherry red as he watched stupidly. Instantly it seemed that his mind was clearing. Slowly and painfully, to be sure, but he *had* remembered that incident of the first short cir-

cuit. He *had* been able to figure out for himself that in this manner the effectiveness of the maddening energy might be nullified.

A great roaring as of rushing waters was in his ears as he slid to the ground. The utter blankness of insensibility swooped down over him.

Darkness had fallen when Bob awoke. For a long time he lay on the hard ground, trying to remember. A dull glow beside him drew his attention and he turned his head to stare. It was the tube of his projector, still red hot from the power which flowed through its slim length. Memory returned with a rush and he staggered to his feet.

Dim forms were there in the pit, some of them corpses, some living creatures. Stumbling from one to the other he quickly found that Zeranu was alive with his senses just returning, and Danny Matthews too, for which Bob was fervently thankful. Phillips, Morey, Donaldson—six of them altogether had survived, whereas ten had come into this place of horror. And the jikiris all were stark and rigid in death.

Sounds of revelry came from beyond the wall of the stronghold. Bingord, thinking he had destroyed them all, was celebrating.

Grimly Bob was shaking Danny into complete wakefulness.

"What the devil? Where am I?" His friend sat up, weakly swaying, surveying the hazy form before him with incredulous eyes. "Oh, it's you, Bob." Suddenly he got to his feet.

"Come on, Dan, snap out of it. There's work to be done." Bob still

gripped his arms, continuing the shaking process. "We've got to storm Bingord's gates and get Gordon," he grated, "Dead or alive, we'll get him. Hear me? Understand?"

"Sure I hear. Let go my arms." Danny was himself once more.

"Stout fellow: listen Danny. There are six of us yet, including Zeranu. The jikiris couldn't hold out. But there are flame pistols and torpedo projectors galore. And Bingord thinking we're all out of the picture. There'll be no look-out."

"Right-oo!" Alert as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred, Danny Matthews proceeded to the task of reviving Donaldson.

Morey and Phillips, having been exposed to the energies for a shorter time, were already on their feet. And Zeranu, shrilling his rage, was at Bob's side.

"Cut out heart from this Bingord," he cackled, "Zeranu do it, boss. You see. We go now?"

"Yes, but you're to leave Bingord to me. You hear? Understand?" Bob remembered that the Martian had an old score to settle with the bandit chief. But he had a fresh one himself. If Gordon——?

"All set." Danny's cheerful voice came out of the darkness.

Searching the packs of the dead jikiris, they soon provided themselves with weapons. For once, Zeranu was uncommunicative.

This time they came boldly out into the open. With earthly muscles accustomed to a bodily weight nearly three times as great as here in the gravity of the red planet, the Terrestrians had no difficulty in

vaulting the ten foot wall of the pit. Reaching down then into the blackness, Bob and Danny drew Zeranu up after them.

Above them reared the wall of the stronghold. They skirted its base and made for the great double gate at the front. Ribald laughed and hoarse shouts of merriment came from within, but no devastating energies struck out at the attackers. Their approach was unseen, unsuspected.

Chapter V Within the Gates

The huge lock melted swiftly away under the combined attack of a half dozen flame pistols. Before its liquid metal had ceased dripping Bob was pushing through the gates.

"Remember, Zeranu," he warned the chortling outcast, "Bingord is *my* meat. I'll tend to him in my own way."

The wizened Martian stopped his exultant chatter, but a crafty light was in his beady eyes.

Danny and the others slipped through after them and stood within the gates, their eyes widening at the sight presented in the open area before them.

"Good Lord!" gasped Bob, his fingers tightening on the butt of his flame pistol, "Look—look what the devil is doing to Gordon."

The younger Coleman was a sagging, half naked figure, strapped to a vertical metal grid that glowed with eery flickerings of the fiendish energy with which it was charged. Bloody sweat oozed from every pore of his bared chest and stood out on

his brow in great drops. But his gaze was steady, fearless.

Bingord stood before him, reeling drunkenly. On his ugly head was a metal cap from which cables led to the grid. Massed against a long dormitory-like building at the rear were Bingord's men, probably sixty or seventy of them. Chulco, the intoxicant, was flowing freely and its fiery potency had already laid out a number of the revellers in the deep coma which follows upon the first mad exhilaration of the vicious Martian distillate. Others of them were rapidly approaching the same condition. And the entire scene was lighted to daylight brilliancy by floodlights mounted on the great wall.

Strangest of all were the antics of Bingord. He capered before his sweating victim like a maniac, snarling wrathful invectives, quite obviously beside himself with a rage that was inflamed by the heat of the chulco he had imbibed.

"You still defy me, do you?" he bellowed, "Still the braggart Terrestrian holds out against the might of Bingord. Very well, you shall see the horrible fate to which your brother was lured in the pit. After that I shall increase the power. To the limit."

The floodlights dimmed as he spoke. And then, amazingly, it was as if the entire enclosure had vanished from sight. Before those who watched was the pit of the rosy mists, dim-lit and ghastly with the blood that spattered its walls. Four bodies were lying sprawled there, bodies of men and twelve animals, twisted and broken—their jikiris,

with open packs spilling their contents. It was a marvelous demonstration of television—and something besides.

Bingord's wild yell clove the night air and the floodlights came abruptly to full brilliance. Aghast, the bandit stood there staring. "They're gone," he shrieked, "Imps of the canals! Some have escaped it. To arms, men, to arms. Make ready to repel——"

And then he had swung about and faced the little party by the gate. A flame pistol was in his hand as by magic and, crackling spitefully, it spouted incandescence. But, quick as he had been, Bob Coleman was quicker. And his own searing ray had severed the bandit's pistol hand at the wrist ere that other flame found its mark. Dropping to the ground, he fired again and Bingord crumpled and fell as his right leg was blasted away at the knee. Screaming horribly, the bandit chief called upon his men to avenge him.

Pandemonium reigned amongst the revellers. Many of them were helpless, and many others in so advanced a state of intoxication as to be unable to raise their weapons. But a dozen white flames flicked out from across the rectangle and young Donaldson cried out chokingly and then lay still, a charred and smouldering heap. Bob's men were on their faces now, firing rapidly into the howling bandit crew. And each spouting flame carried its message of certain death to a bandit.

"Give 'em a torpedo, Danny," grunted Bob, crawling out ahead.

Unslinging his projector, Dan Matthews rose to his knees. The violent detonation of the ultranite tor-

pedo across the court came almost simultaneously with the spang of its propelling ray. Mangled bodies hurtled skyward over there. Stones, debris, and twisted steel girders that flung upward and rained down over the area. And the low building crumpled in a mass of ruins.

No more crackling flame darted out at the attackers, for the few surviving bandits were utterly demoralized; they were shrieking in horrible fear of the Terrestrial high explosive, scrambling for cover and making desperate efforts to scale their own wall. Only a few escaped that way, however, as the yelling Americans, with Zeranau, an avenging demon, in their midst charged them with flame pistols roaring.

Seeing that his men were well able to finish the job without him, Bob ran to the grid where Gordon was bound. The younger man's head had dropped to his chest and he was all but unconscious as Bob slashed away the straps that held him fast to the glowing latticework.

"What has he done to you, boy?" asked Bob, unmindful of the stabbing pains the grid's weird energy sent through his body. "If he has killed you I'll burn him to a cinder on his own torture rack."

"I'll be all right." Gordon smiled weakly as he slipped to the ground with the loosing of the final bond. "But it was a tough time. The energy of the grid—for hours, and the mental torture. Bob, the images on the wall were only projections on a cloud of vapor—but this other thing—that cap on his head. Mental images sent out from his vile mind. Monsters in the air that I had to fight. I *knew*

they were unreal but I couldn't help fighting. In another moment I'd have been a raving maniac. That's what he wanted. But we licked him, Bob . . . you licked him . . . I . . ."

Gordon Coleman could speak no more; he had fainted. Bob saw that the bandage had been torn from his head, showing a recently stitched wound across cheek and scalp—an ugly wound.

"How'd he get this?" he demanded of Bingord, who lay moaning close by, "You did it, I suppose."

The bandit compressed his lips and even the moaning stopped. An implacable hatred was in his yellow eyes.

"Him did it, yes." Zeranu had come from the last of the fighting and he spurned the huge bulk of the bandit with his foot. "Him start try kill Gordon in Tos-tanor. Before you come. But the young Gordon beat him so he run away. Have not his men that time—Bingord not. That why he come back. Why he hate the young Gordon."

"Yeah? Leave him alone, Zeranu." Bob lowered his brother's dark head gently to the ground and turned savagely on the bandit.

"All right, you!" he grated, yanking him upright and flinging his maimed body toward the glowing grid, "You're going to get a taste of your own medicine."

Bingord struck out with his one good arm and kicked mightily with the remaining leg. But he was helpless in the powerful arms of the earthman. In a trice he was bound securely where Gordon had been and he squirmed and shrieked as the

energies of his own devilish mechanism shot him through and through.

Bob had snatched the metal cap from his head and now examined it curiously. The cables, he saw, entered a control box that was set on a small pedestal. From thence they were connected to the metal grid. A rheostat was in the box, its lever set in mid-position. Experimentally, Bob moved the arm forward. Bingord screamed frightfully as the glow from the latticework brightened.

"Hal!" Don't like it so well yourself, do you?" Bob grinned as he increased the power by another notch. From somewhere underneath his feet there was the whining protest of a generator as it took the additional load.

Danny Matthews and the others had gathered round and were watching the procedure. Bingord was begging now, cravenly, and bloody sweat oozed from his pores.

Bob adjusted the metal cap over his own head and examined the levers in the control box once more. He opened a switch and the floodlights dimmed.

Bingord shrieked anew.

"Afraid of this mental torture of yours, eh?" Bob sneered, "The terror of the drylands is a coward at heart."

He set his mind to the picturing of his own dream of the roadway across the barren lands. And the wall of the stronghold dissolved away before them. Out there on the lava beds was a gleaming stretch of tower-supported roadway, extending to the horizon in the one direction and disappearing through a rift in the

hills in the other. Many speeding ronsals were passing along its length in both directions. A prosperous village rose up as by magic from the lava beds. Water flowed in the fissures and the bright purple of luxurious vegetation carpeted the streets of the village and children played before the doorsteps of neat dwellings. A pleasing vision of the future.

"That's what you've been fighting, Bingord," Bob exulted, "But you've lost. You're through—understand? Even if I let you live, you're through. Licked."

"Hrrgh—this not torture," Zeranu rasped, "Let Martian show you."

He snatched the cap from Bob's head and fitted it to his own.

"Let him do it," begged Danny as the vision of the roadways vanished and Bob sprang at the outcast, "He'll do it right."

"Not a bad idea at that." Bob Coleman subsided.

The vengeful Martian leaped at the bandit, striking his drooping head with the flat of his hand. "You see now," he yelled, "Even if shut eyes brain see. Remember Zeranu. Remember Cleda."

Once more the fortress wall seemed to melt away in the night. By the glow of the torture grid they could see the fierce glitter in the beady eyes of Zeranu, as he thrust his withered face close to Bingord's red-streaked beard.

And then there was enacted before them the tragedy of a generation ago—a scene materialized out of the past. On the outskirts of a canal city there stood a neat cottage before which a slender and re-

markably beautiful, golden-skinned Martian woman stood. Her eyes were alight with expectation as she shaded them with her hand and looked down the pathway as if expecting the coming of a dear one.

"Remember Cleda, Bingord!" Zeranu's voice was awful as it came out of the shadows. "She waiting for me, then."

The bandit gurgled stark gibberish in his terror. There was the sharp sound of the blow as Zeranu struck him again.

And in the scene pictured so vividly out of the memory of Zeranu, as his mental impulses were converted into light images by the machine, there appeared a group of riders. Coming in from the drylands, they were, and at their head was a great bearded half breed, this same Bingord, a mere youth then but as evil of countenance as now.

The woman cried out in alarm and ran for the door of the house. But the bandit chief had slipped from his jikiri and intercepted her. She was in his arms then, beating at his broad chest with puny fists. And the Bingord of the past laughed raucously, a miniature of the titanic guffaw of his amplifiers of the present. Once, when her clothing was almost torn from her gleaming body, the woman broke free and a stone from the path was in her hands. She flung it with all her strength and it caught the bandit fairly between the eyes, momentarily stunning him and cutting a gash in his forehead. With a bellow of rage he rushed upon her, forgetting his lust in the fury that came to replace it. A knife rose flashing

and fell. Again and again until the woman was a pitiful, bleeding corpse at his feet.

"Cleda!" The Americans were aghast at the horror of the thing as the vision melted away and Zeranu's voice came out of the darkness. The old Martian had switched from the Sol-ido and was now screeching fluently in his own tongue. "It was thus you slew her, monster of the drylands. And so it is that Zeranu will avenge Cleda. Now!"

Bob reached for the switch in the control box and the floodlights flashed on blindingly.

At the torture grid Zeranu was a towering god of vengeance. Years seemed to have slipped from him as if by the magic of Bingord's machine. His right arm rose and fell as Bingord screamed. A curved blade that was in his hand, bright only when it flashed the first time, was dripping red now. With monotonous regularity it swung aloft and drove down long after the bandit's cries had ceased.

Presently the outcast, exhausted by his emotions, had dropped to his knees, spreading his scrawny arms wide and raising his face to the heavens, giving thanks to the ancient gods of Mars.

"And that," whispered Bob in awed tones, "is that."

Gordon Coleman, roused by the commotion, sat erect with an effort.

Instantly Bob was at his side, supporting him in his strong arms. "How do you feel now, boy?" he demanded anxiously, "Think you'll be all right again?"

"Surest thing." The game youngster lurched groggily to his feet and stood there tottering. But his color was returning and new strength slowly suffused his being. "Just give me a day or two and I'll be as good as new."

By the flashing courage of the black eyes Bob knew that he had spoken the truth. And the strong pulse under his exploring finger gave him double assurance.

Gordon turned to view the scene at the torture grid. Without feeling he regarded the bloody corpse that dangled there. But his gaze was one of understanding and approbation as it rested on the kneeling figure of Zeranu.

"Glad the old boy got him at last," he muttered.

"I guess that goes for me too," Bob admitted.

"And Bob." Gordon was suddenly enthusiastic. "Bob, we can start back for Tos-tanor tomorrow. The extension can go right ahead. We'll begin surveying as soon as we're there. There's nothing to hinder us now. We'll——"

Gordon's head nodded jerkily. He was falling asleep on his feet.

"Yeah, we'll do all those things. But first off you need some rest—and some care." Bob spoke softly at the last, seeing that Morpheus had definitely claimed the exhausted youngster. He lowered him gently to the ground and padded his own coat under his head.

Watching the two, Danny Matthews grinned broadly. They had won the game.

The End

THE GLOBOID TERROR

R. F. STARZL

Illustrated by LEO MOREY

WHEN Crombie was assigned the task of unraveling the mystery of the X disappearing "stones", he knew his life was at stake-For not only were the diamond mines of Venus the most productive in the system, they were also the most dangerous!



¶ "Get back to the compound and tell your father to keep away from here," he commanded.

HEWOOD Crombie, corporal of the Interplanetary Flying Police and holder of the 2124 Efficiency Medal, was spending his first sleeping period on Venus for three years in a strange manner. He was sitting in a small metal closet attached to the room assigned to him, peering out of the slightly opened door at the far bed, where Crombie's weary body should have been lying, reposed an effigy of himself, a sheet covering all but a shock of red hair and what in the semi-darkness might have been taken for part of a face.

The bedroom itself was artificially cooled, a delightful haven of repose for one who had all day long piloted a flying ovoid through the steaming murk of Venus' north polar regions, but the little closet was not so cooled, and the ceaseless warm rains that poured down its outside shell kept the humid air of Crombie's retreat at an effective parboiling temperature.

Silently but with conviction Crombie cursed himself for his slavery to "hunches." As he was about to slip into soothing slumber in the wide, deep bed, something had jerked him to wakefulness. Something had impelled him to drag his protesting limbs across the room into the purgatory he was now enduring. Something had forced him to keep his leaden eyelids open and to deny himself the rest for which his body tormented him.

His "hunch" had already cost him half of the nine-hour sleeping period. It was likely to cost him the other half. Life at the mine colony was regulated by chronometers and bells—not by the dim blob of the sun, that occasionally could be seen,

riding high around the polar horizon interminably.

It was hard to understand how danger could threaten. The door was securely locked and bolted on the inside. There were no windows. Light and air were supplied by foolproof mechanical means, while the cooling liquid was circulated between the webs of the metal ceiling.

Immersed in bitter musings, Crombie at first failed to hear a slight noise in the air-intake duct on the wall opposite his hiding place, but a moment later came the sharp scrape of metal. All his senses alert, he could barely make out a hand reaching through a neat hole cut in the ventilator screen. It was a long, writhing hand with seven white fingers, recognizable at once as the hand of a native Venerian. With consummate skill it removed the invisible locking device on the inside, removed the whole screen, and lowered it gently to the floor by means of a cord.

The body of the creature now appeared. Like all Venerians, it suggested, to some extent, an extremely emaciated human being. Over six feet in height, it was so slight that it crept through the nine-inch-square duct without difficulty and bounded soundlessly to the floor. Possessed of a long, thin arm that grew from the middle of its chest, it manipulated this member with such skill and dexterity that the absence of a second arm was hardly noticeable. But Crombie was not interested in the odd appearance of the visitor. "Look out for the Venerian" had long been a stock procedure in the methods of the Interplanetary

Flying Police, and Crombie knew that in those long, melancholy heads there was a store of cunning sufficient to make up for any physical deficiency.

A twin of the first intruder now appeared. He pushed before him a metal box which he handled most deferentially. Momentarily he touched fingers with the one who had preceded him, conveying his thoughts. The other nodded, took the box and carefully set it on the floor beside the bed.

The first Venerian started to pick up the sheet to expose the man he thought was underneath it, but desisted as again the other's finger's sought his. Their hands tangled in lengthy and animated conversation. Finally they both nodded. The one who seemed to be the leader picked up the box, and gingerly holding it over the head with the red locks, opened it and let the contents fall. The box contained a fluffy black mold that clung to everything it touched with a strange and horrible tenacity.

Rage coursed through the veins of the watching policeman. He was acquainted with the black mold. He had seen men, every bit as good as himself, accidentally touch a little of it in the dark, warm caves far underground during the Equatorial rebellion. He had seen the mold spread over their skins as fire spreads over the tall, rank grasses of Mars after the canals have dried up. He had seen them literally devoured by the voracious black vegetation, and he had helped burn the body of a dear friend and comrade—no—not

the body—a mass of black mold in the sardonic semblance only of the human body it had absorbed and replaced.

With a roar Crombie bounded out of the closet. He seized the two emaciated necks of the would-be assassins and brought their heads together with a sound like the bursting of a pumpkin that has fallen from a wagon. Both dropped limp in his grasp; they were dead. Immediately Crombie regretted his action. He knew he should have kept them alive to sweat the truth out of them.

He threw the bodies against the further wall to remain until morning and turned his attention to the bed. The black mold lay quiescent on the red wig and pasty-complexioned false face beneath. The artificial coolness of the room made it a little sluggish, but Crombie knew that the warmth of his body would soon have awakened it to devilish activity. He focused the standard weapon of the Interplanetary, a D'Arsonval projector, on the bed, and saw the black mold turn gray in death. Assuring himself that he had covered every inch of the bed with the high-frequency beams, he rolled everything into a sheet and threw it into the waste basket. Then he sprawled upon the surgically sterile mattress and spent the rest of the sleeping period in profoundly blissful oblivion.

Crombie rose to the chime of a bell, and stepped into the adjoining bathroom, where he stripped and stood under the shower. When he pulled a chain 'the collected rain

water from the roof, unfailingly warm, sluiced down upon him, and this was followed by a needle spray of ice water. He shouted to himself contentedly when the cold water struck him, knowing that the sound-proof walls would not permit anyone to be disturbed.

Speculating on the night's happenings, and regretting the sleep he had lost, the officer applied some depilatory soap to his three-day beard, wiped soap and beard off on a towel, and was quickly arrayed in the light waterproof garments customary on Venus.

On the way down to the factor's—the general managers—private living quarters, he instructed a native servant to dispose of the bodies.

He waited in the breakfast room for the widowed factor and his daughter to appear, full of pleasurable anticipation for the meal to come, as was only natural for one who has cooked for himself in the cramped quarters of a police patrol flying ovoid.

"Good morning, sir!"

Crombie looked up as Factor Burgess entered the room, startled by the distinctly hostile tone of the words. Unconsciously he took professional note of the man on whose shoulders rested the responsibility for the huge diamond mine. Past middle age, tall and almost slight in build, with graying hair and aristocratic features, Burgess would have seemed more at home in the counting room of a terrestrial bank. Yet there were more than traces of the energy

which had placed him in this responsible position. He carried with him an aura of command, overlain at the moment with anxiety.

And the load he carried was not small. Of course, the diamonds mined were not of the gem variety so desirable in antiquity. Fine gem diamonds had been produced artificially for years. The diamonds sought here were the incomparably hard and tough gray diamonds, which had taken the place in industry formerly occupied by the more common black diamonds, or carbonado "carbons" which had formerly been the best for rock drills and similar work. Throughout the far-flung solar system men were penetrating the very cores of the planets in search of minerals—in eager pursuit of mystery, and on Venus and Earth and Mars and even sunblistered Mercury the rare and clean-cutting "gray carbons" from this lone mine were regarded with respect and affection by swaggering hard-rock men.

There was no relenting in the chilly look of the factor.

"I've heard the Interplanetary Flyers always get their man," he remarked with cutting sarcasm. "I see you've made an early start."

"Somebody made an early start. I merely finished it," Crombie said calmly. "What do you suppose those beggars were in my room for?"

"The poor fellows probably came to see if you were comfortable. As servants in this house, they should have the right to do that without being killed—murdered, I might say."

The officer reddened until his face was nearly the same color as his unruly hair.

"If you feel that way about it," he remarked, getting to his feet, "I guess I won't be your guest for breakfast."

"You'll eat your breakfasts in the guard-house for some time, my fine fellow," Burgess retorted with rising anger, "when my report of this affair reaches headquarters."

"Speaking about reports." Crombie drawled, "you should be more interested in my report than I in yours. Remember, I have here in my pocket complete authority to investigate the affairs of this mine. You know as well as I do that production has fallen off in the past year from \$175,000,000 to \$90,000,000. You have given no satisfactory explanation of this loss and the company's engineers have not substantiated your theory that the mine is petering out. When the company sends an auditor to check up he disappears . . ."

"He lost his way and wandered into the swamp."

"Maybe, maybe. Nobody has blamed you for his death. I might say the directors have been very lenient with you. No one has accused you of anything, but it is evident that someone is diverting the mine production and hiding the carbons for a real clean-up. That's what I'm here to investigate, and if you want to keep suspicion away from yourself, you'll assist me instead of putting obstacles in my way."

The factor's belligerence had collapsed, and his face was a mottled gray.

"I'm ready to help you," he muttered.

"Well and good," said Crombie. "Now the first thing I want to do is show you why I had to kill those two rascals."

He led the way to his room, pulled the waste basket to light, prepared to show his evidence.

The waste basket was empty. The articles covered with the dead mold were gone; fresh coverings were on the bed. The damaged screen had been replaced with a new one.

Baffled and raging inwardly, Crombie made his way to the human mess hall, where some half hundred straw bosses, mostly Terrestrials, but with a sprinkling of huge, morose Martians, had their meals separately from the Venerian laborers. Here he made the best shift he could with the hearty but carelessly served fare. His humor was not improved when a surly Martian accidentally spilled his plate of stew and then wanted to fight him on account of it.

To a casual visitor the scene would have been one to impress itself on the memory—the long, metal, windowless hall with its arched ceiling; the subdued murmur of rain on the roof; the rows of hard-bitten faces. Fifty jaws champed methodically. Fifty pairs of eyes regarded the plates before them, vouchsafing the stranger scarcely a glance.

Was that indifference assumed? Crombie thought that men in such an isolated outpost would display a little more curiosity toward a stranger. He had introduced himself as an electronic expert sent to examine the conversion motors, and it

seemed to him that he had been accepted rather too carelessly.

Covertly the officer studied Nusskopf, the hairy little man opposite him. Nusskopf was not a miner, the photograph-embellished service record had shown. He was the official hunter, whose duty it was to keep the huge saurians, that roamed the arctic zone from blundering into the mine area with consequent damage and confusion. And not only the comparatively harmless saurians, but other forms of life more inimical. Nusskopf had a bluff heartiness of manner, giving the impression of a man of great energy, which he extended even to the process of eating, as evidenced by the floating ribs—of a sort of Venerian horse—ranged around his plate. Crombie made a mental note that, as an official hunter, the man would be free to go about in any part of the mine workings, or in the surrounding wilderness, if he desired.

One after another he looked them over; Hoyt, Clasen, Murray, Nar Tol the Martian, Winterfeld, Ozdorf, another Martian, Arthur, Henesy, Mossman, and so on to the end of the table and back again. By the time the meal was over he had identified each man by his photograph and service record, and his efficient policeman's brain catalogued the information, but he failed to get a lead of real promise.

Crombie crossed the steaming pavement to the low, arched administration building and was admitted at once to the office of Lawrence De Maine, the general superintendent, second in command to Burgess. De Maine at least seemed

to have stood the loss of a couple of Venerian servants fairly well. Stepping into his beautifully furnished private office out of that primitive world, Crombie helped himself to a long pale cigar out of the proffered box and relaxed comfortably into the deep cushions of a chair. He grinned at the smiling De Maine, noting the small, trim figure, the consummate sophistication of the fine features which missed being arrogant by a shade, the stiff little, cockily self-satisfied black mustache.

"Sorry to have missed you at breakfast," said De Maine easily. "The Old Man was somewhat upset, eh?"

"He was," Crombie drawled. "Most decidedly. Not that I blame him much. I tried to show him the evidence that I had to do it in self-defense, but when we got to the room it was gone."

De Maine nodded assent. "Tricky devils, these natives," he agreed. "I learned a long time ago to watch my step and never give them the first chance. Only, ah—" he smiled—"if we have a—ah—casualty, we aim not to let the Old Man see the remains. It was tough luck to have it happen right there in the residence."

"My old chief was with me in the Equatorial rebellion, and he knows the natives, so I don't expect any trouble, even if Burgess reports me, but I might have easier work if he'd be reasonable," said Crombie.

De Maine became grave. "It's a serious matter," he said earnestly. "It isn't only the financial loss, but the industries using the carbons have complained to the In-

terplanetary Congress and we're in danger of losing the concession on their representation that industry is being harmed by the shortage. Wherever the carbons are going, it's not on the market. There must be several bushels of them hidden somewhere—a stupendous fortune for the thief. In the meantime a group of Martian financiers are going after our concession and dividends are falling.”

Crombie nodded. Fixing De Maine's dark eyes, he hurled a question at him—

“Confidentially, do you think Burgess knows anything about it?”

The superintendent flushed, looked uneasy.

“I couldn't say,” he answered slowly. “I have always admired Mr. Burgess and would have to have strong evidence before I'd believe he had anything to do with the conspiracy. No, I believe he is innocent. But of course I realize that I am under suspicion too!” he exclaimed.

“Everybody is,” was Crombie's frank rejoinder. “But you can save me a lot of trouble, De Maine, if you'll tell me this—does the shortage occur in the separator works or after you give carbons to Mr. Burgess?”

De Maine looked troubled.

“What I am about to tell you,” he said slowly, “may get me into trouble, but you'll find it out anyway. The truth is, as you have intimated, the production of the carbons is as great as ever. I have been turning them over to the factor regularly, and have the receipts in full in my private file. He locks the carbons in the manganeseberyllium safe, each

day's production in a little bag, and by the time the time lock permits opening the safe again, about sixty per cent of the carbons are gone, yet the seal of the bags is unbroken and the safe shows no sign of having been tampered with.”

“Of the forty per cent remaining, is any taken in subsequent thefts?”

“No.”

“That's a pretty thin story to tell the directors.”

De Maine flushed. “I know it. Rather than making such a report we changed the records to correspond, hoping that we should be able to work out a solution.”

“To put it plainly, you conspired with Burgess to cover up his apparent guilt.”

“He isn't guilty! I saw him seal the bags and seal up the carbons, and the time lock absolutely prevents opening except at specified times.”

“But just the same it was a sappy trick.”

“I know it,” De Maine admitted, a little nervously. “But you see”—he hesitated—“I'm engaged to Verna, his daughter.”

“Oh,” Crombie grunted. “It wouldn't be the first time it's been done, but it's foolish. This will probably cost you your job.”

“Perhaps,” De Maine agreed earnestly, “but would that solve the mystery? I admit I was a fool, but a man will do much to save the girl he loves from disgrace. Give me a chance, and perhaps I can get you the real thief. I still believe the Old Man is innocent.”

“I won't go building planetoids,” the officer promised in the idiom of the day. “But about those dis-

appearing carbons—do you suppose there is some kind of fourth-dimensional monkey-business about it?"

De Maine grasped at the straw.

"There might be," he assented eagerly. "That would account for everything. But isn't that all pure speculation? I've never heard of the trick being actually done."

Crombie racked his brain. Shortly before leaving the earth he had taken a news-injection. The so-called micro-cosmic serum, taken from the brain of a professional news-reader and specially treated, had planted in his brain, among other facts, the memory of a recent scientific event. A young mathematician, delving in the ruins of ancient New York, had come across a well preserved copy of a twentieth-century scientific magazine. Certain hints in a story therein had enabled him to perform the feat that had baffled scientists for ages—he had turned an orange inside out without breaking the shell.

"Perhaps," suggested the officer half hopefully, "someone temporarily turns the safe and bags inside out and helps himself to the contents."

"If he does, the process is invisible to us in the third dimension. We've been guarding the safe, but the carbons disappear just the same."

Their desultory conversation was interrupted by the vision that appeared in the suddenly opened doorway. Crombie did not need to be told that she was Verna Burgess. Nor did he need more than one guess to realize that she didn't care for him.

"How do?" she acknowledged the

introduction stiffly. Her blue eyes took him in contemptuously. In the back of Crombie's brain a camera clicked; noting her lissomeness and grace triumphant under the stiff rain garments, her dark, heavy hair under a transparent cap, De Maine's sacrifice to shield her father seemed more natural. What else could a man do?

"How are you, Mr. Policeman?" she said pleasantly. "Have you killed any children or cripples since breakfast?"

Crombie turned without a word. Glancing at the infra-red periscope, he apparently became absorbed in the depressing, soggy image of the outside world, while he listened to the low-pitched conversation behind him. Like most eavesdroppers, he heard nothing complimentary, and so he stalked out into the tepid downpour.

Crombie put on a pair of goggles which were part of the standard Venerian equipment of the force. Although heavily shrouded in clouds, with an atmosphere surcharged with water vapors, which make it impossible for a man to see more than a hundred yards in any direction, Venus is rather richly supplied with light of the infra-red series. The harmonic goggles took advantage of the normally invisible infra-red, utilizing the long waves to set up shorter vibrations visible to the eye in a manner analagous in reverse order to the fluoroscope used by the ancients for X-rays. With their use Crombie was able to see a half-mile or more.

The mine was some hundreds of yards from the walled compound

which contained the administration, residence and barracks structures. Leaving the firm, paved court, Crombie was swallowed up immediately by a wilderness so primitive, so dismal and terrifying that even he, an old campaigner, felt a vague uneasiness. There was no such thing as solid ground. On either side of the wide "corduroy" road, constructed of tall palm trunks laid side by side, was quaking muskeg. Woe to the man who lost the road or the occasional outcroppings of solid rock that provided the only means of ground travel!

Vast ferns, towering a hundred feet in the air, drooped over the man-made lane, shutting out the sullen sky. Through the darkness, difficult even for the infra-red rays to penetrate, came the patter and drip of perpetual rain, interspersed with the barks, bellows and grunts of harmless beasts that were tolerated near the mines. Grotesque caricatures of turtles with huge hornbills splashed off the comparative dryness of the road and fled noisily into the odorous fog. Once the officer's way was barred by a vague shape that sat on its haunches in the road and browsed the luscious, dropping top of a tree with long, thick, fleshy leaves. It squealed in terror as the D'Aarsonval current singed its flesh, and its crashing flight roused a hideous bedlam that did not subside until long after Crombie had been admitted to the squat, rambling building that housed the machinery at the mine entrance. As he entered the door he felt a blast of frigid air that was, after his sweating journey, both welcome and disquieting.

Crombie stared curiously. This was not what he had expected, and the chief engineer, a highly developed Eurasian, volunteered information.

"You surprised, not? You expect see great pit—big hole in ground? Yes? Like they mined black carbons on Earth? Maybe this look crazy, hey? Well, crazy like dibdar, maybe. Ha, he! That a joke. The dibdar, he small, but he the smartest animal fellow on Venus. Well, this the only way get carbons on Venus. Big hole fill with water right quick all of a sudden, so we leave top ground. Freeze it! Froze hard as rock. Men work under roof frozen mud. Walls frozen; pillars frozen. Mark sort of cavern, see? Underneath cavern we make 'nother—eh—sort basement, see? Ha, ha!"

Crombie left the ha-haing engineer and stepped into one of the magnetic elevators, touched a button that would cause him to be deposited at the floor level of the first cavern, five hundred feet below. As he started gently to descend, he saw a laborer, carrying a crowbar, come hurrying across the room as if trying to get into the elevator before it went down, brushing aside several Venerian helpers like so many straws. The laborer stumbled clumsily and sprawled on the floor. The crowbar flew from his hand, straight and true as a javelin, into the copper maze of the electrical selector box. Instantly there was a blinding flash, the scream of a siren, and Crombie felt the floor drop from under him. The cage was falling, free and unimpeded, down a hole, to end in total destruction fifteen miles down.

In those roaring times, when the solar system still presented real frontiers for the hardy adventurer to batter down, a man could not be a member of the Interplanetary Flying Police without facing death and danger a thousands times. Crombie was more or less injured to it. Yet, as he hurtled helplessly down that hole, he oozed sweat at every pore. To be smashed to a pulp in that fiendish muck was no way for a man to die!

He must have fallen at least a mile before the swift flashes of brightly lighted caverns ceased, and he continued to drop in darkness. The spaces below had been thoroughly cleaned out, and were merely kept in their frozen condition to support those above, which formed the nucleus for a system of lateral excavations extending for miles in all directions under roofs of frozen mud.

Another eternity etched itself on his mind, though it must have been a matter of only a few seconds. He was now dropping, as it seemed, as fast as a bullet. The rollers of the guiding rails pounded a mad rhythm. He was sick—so sick he believed he would die before he hit bottom. And then it happened.

With a demoniacal shriek the rollers bit into their bearings. A violent lurch hurled Crombie to the bottom of the car. Again the car dropped, and again it was seized. The guides grew red-hot and melted with a trail like a meteorite's. Mud began to spray through the gratings. They were scraping the sides. For economy of refrigeration the abandoned workings had been allowed to get too warm. The mud and clay had softened, squeezing the elevator

shaft out of line. The deceleration was now violent and sustained. From above came a rush of air and a violent rumble. A mass of mud was falling down. For an agonizing moment Crombie thought he was going to be buried alive, but the avalanche brushed by the car, muttering and mumbling as it were, to the infernal depths below. Suddenly the car left the guides altogether, but its appalling speed had been checked. It plopped harmlessly into the soft mud.

Silence and darkness—save for the drip-drip of water. Scrambling out of the cage that had nearly been his coffin, the officer threw his flashlight, a powerful type using the newly discovered rare mineral vorium as a disintegrating agent on magnesium, about his prison. He found himself on top of a sticky talus of clay that had been dislodged from the side of the bore. Overhead a very dim light was visible—possibly about three miles up. Below, a sickening chasm. There was apparently no way out except the elevator shaft.

Crombie hoped for no rescue. He knew that the wrecking of the control was done deliberately to assassinate him. He summed up his advantage:

Those above thought him dead.

His disadvantage: a climb up that frightful chimney along the rails. He started.

An hour later he had climbed 500 feet, to the floor of the cavern next above. Here he had a bit of luck. He found an abandoned conduit for refrigerating pipes and electric cables, with the metal ladder still intact.

In another hour his hands were

swollen and raw. His shoes had been cut to shreds and he was climbing on bare feet. But he was sustained by the knowledge that the pipes were again very cold, covered with ice. This meant that he was approaching the zone of active work.

It was step, haul, grunt, push, curse. Every movement was agony. Every foot gained was torture. His head was reeling. Crombie knew he must soon relax and fall. With desperate effort he crawled into a lateral conduit, inched his way along for a short distance. Temporarily safe, he fainted.

Crombie must have been unconscious in that inky blackness for several hours. When he awakened, it was because he heard his name spoken. Hardly a foot from where he lay was a square opening, dimly outlined by a weak light beyond. Had he continued his blind squirming he would have fallen several feet to the floor of the cavern into which he was looking. He crept a little closer to the opening and looked out. He received a shock of surprise when he saw De Maine; barely repressed an exclamation of joy. He was glad for that instinctive repression when De Maine began to speak:

"There's no use deluding ourselves, man. Just because we got rid of Crombie doesn't mean we're safe. The Interplanetary Flyers will send another man, and if we get him——

"——they'll send another, and in the end they'll get us. That means the tube!"

He made an expressive gesture, only too clear to the others. They visualized the long, sad walk from the death cell. They saw themselves thrust into the vitreous tube, a dull,

momentary glow of the surrounding helix——

And a second later the ashes would be ready for delivery to the relatives. A laborer—the one who had thrown the crow-bar—gave a shuddering groan.

"Oh Gawd! Oh Gawd!" he wailed.

"Shut up! Why not try other fella! Ha, ha! That's joke. We're down, you know—closer other fella! Ha, ha!"

"Don't be fools!" De Maine snapped. "I'll take care of you—all of you. The carbons are already in my ovoid, the '*Spittin' Devil*', except for this week's haul. We'll hop off for Mars, where I have friends who'll take care of us. Then a little plastic surgery, and we're fixed for life."

"Just where is your ship, if I may ask?" inquired Hanford, with a snaggle-toothed grin.

"Boil that!" De Maine said sharply. "Think I'm a fool? What'd keep you from stealing the ship on your own?"

"Aw!" a sallow-faced individual intervened. "We wouldn't have no place to go. We gotta have you anyway, and you're bright enough to have the ship locked, I guess."

De Maine considered "You'd better go and wait for me at the ship at that. I'll tell you where it is: Follow the corduroy until you come to the green outcropping. Follow that west until you come to the beach of the Endless Sea. The *Spittin' Devil* is nestled under Despair Rock. And no funny business. I've got something to attend to first, but the man who isn't there and ready when I come gets left."

"We'll be there!" they assured him in jovial chorus. They had been De Maine's pawns in this business, and

among themselves they had discussed the possibility of being double-crossed. The fact that their Venerian co-plotters were being left to their fate bothered them not at all. Let the natives go back to the jungle!

Crombie was called upon to act. He rejected the idea of covering them with his projector and marching them out as his prisoners. There were at least ten men there, including the hunter. Several were armed. This meant that Crombie would be seared to death before he could accomplish anything, because the men were not all within reach of an instantaneous sweep of the officer's weapon. Or the survivors could play safe and gas him to death in the conduit.

Desperate measures were necessary. The men were on their way to a large freight elevator near by. Crombie dropped quietly out of the hole, suppressing a groan. He was thankful that the emission tube at the top of the abandoned cavern was near the end of its run and gave little light. He squirmed through shallow depressions in the floor, heedless of the half frozen mud, and so gained the rear of the metal latticework encasing the elevator shaft. De Maine adjusted the inductances and the cage began its ascent slowly.

In a few seconds the floor of the cage was on a level with the officer's eyes. Quickly he squeezed through the latticework, shuddering as he tried to forget the yawning hole before him. Calling on his tortured muscles for their last ounce of energy he leaped into space——

For a harrowing moment it seemed that his straining fingers must

miss the edge of the floor truss. But they caught—slipped. The vortical flux was taking hold of the casing rings and the acceleration upward put a cruel strain on the desperate man underneath. In a minute or two, however, the induction constant was reached and the strain on Crombie was somewhat relieved. He managed to get a firm hold with both his hands and so held on for the rest of the interminable ascent.

The men clattered out of the cage and out of the building, and Crombie worked his way to the end of the truss. He was barely able to reach a member of the elevator casing and so to pull his way to safety.

But Crombie had been hasty in assuming that all the men had left the building. As he wormed his way thankfully to solid footing again, he was greeted with a shout, and a yellow figure fled from the scene, ruthlessly trampling a frail Venerian who was oiling a conveyor. The creature threshed about under the machine which did the heavy labor he was incapable of doing and died.

A spot of light fell on Crombie's chest. For a second he stared at it in surprise. For when such a light struck a man he was supposed to be dead. The tinkle of broken glass near by brought realization. The indicator light of that particular weapon was out of order—the invisible twin D'Arsonval beams had missed their mark.

With a shout Crombie leaped to the protection of a huge motor near by. Crackling sparks playing about the expansion spheres showed where the beams were impinging. Presently he found one of his enemies, trying to bring his weapon

to bear from a conveyor pole outside. That man went down. The officer put on his infra-red goggles, and was gratified to see several more marksmen trying for him from the dead stumps of giant ferns. These, too, stumbled to the frozen ground. Crombie swept the jungle, hoping that nothing in the compound would get into his weapon's unlimited range. There were bestial cries, crashes, the sough of huge, invisible wings.

Crombie cautiously peered out of a rear door. Evidently this building was a considerable distance from the one he had entered several hours ago. A cautious sweep of the projector brought the snap of electricity but no sign of an ambush. He crept to the front and ascertained that there was no man alive there. Only seven were dead, showing here and there ghastly ash patches.

"That leaves De Maine and two of his men, not to say anything about old Burgess and his daughter, and not counting the natives," he muttered.

He left the ice-covered area of the mines and trudged back toward the compound. He had hopes of intercepting the party that would be returning from the compound, but could not find any green outcropping.

The residence seemed deserted. Not a servant was in sight. Crombie burned off the lock of a closed door, kicked it open. It led into the factor's library. It disclosed Burgess, too, just recovering from a blow on the head.

"They're gone!" the shaken old man wailed. "De Maine the scoundrel! He took Verna with him."

"You mean she went with him," Crombie amended dryly.

"I mean he forced her," the old man insisted. "One of the natives gave De Maine away. He's the one who's been robbing the company. Putting in a percentage of chemical imitations with the real carbons, keeping the rest. I trusted him—never examined them closely. The chemical imitations volatilized over night, leaving the safe short, yet the seals were unbroken. He came here a little while ago—we denounced him. He laughed—struck me—must have taken her with him——"

"Quick, which way to the green outcropping?"

"Take the corduroy away from the mine, toward the sea."

So that explained why he had not met them. There was another corduroy. Crombie ran, unlimbering his projector for action. He found the outcrop, its color due to a thick, slippery moss. Several times he nearly slipped off into the morass, each time barely finding a hold for his lacerated fingers. But the distance was short. In a few minutes his feet trod the comparatively firm sand of the beach.

The goggles disclosed three figures running toward a huge, egg-shaped body nestling in the sand beside a rock. That would be the *Spit-tin' Devil*, De Maine's flying ovoid, beside Despair Rock. They were dragging an unwilling fourth—the girl. The officer rapidly overtook the struggling four. By the time they had reached the rock he was within a hundred feet of them, invisible to them, but able to see plainly.

Suddenly the four stopped. Some-

thing had come out of the sea. Crombie's scalp prickled and a shudder coursed down his spine. He recognized that half-mythical sea-monster, which for hundreds of years thereafter, was to make human settlement on the shores of the Venetian seas a risky gamble.

It came toward its victims with a slow, rhythmic flowing motion, laying a part of its amorphous body on the sand and drawing the rest after it in a deceptive, slow-seeming movement. With horrible, remorseless ease it traversed that short stretch of beach. Then, as by command, the three men drew their projectors, trained them on that shimmering, uncertain spheroid of terror. The girl, released, shrieked and ran toward Crombie. As his form loomed up out of the murky fog she tried to evade him, but he caught her roughly, held her for an instant.

"Get back to the compound and tell your father to keep away from

here," he commanded. He turned his attention to the tragedy on the water's edge.

Like figures in a nightmare, the doomed men still stood immovable, their projectors held on the menace, but the beams passed *through* the transparent membrane and phosphorescent contents. They could not harm it. For one brief instant, evanescent as the dissolving clouds on the surface of a bubble, the wretches stared gauntly at their doom. In the next, the men turned to run, and like a fleeting shadow, the sea terror rolled after them, encircling then, blotting them out, obliterating them. For another heartbeat it paused, vibrating like a mountain of disturbed jelly, then leisurely rolled back into the sea.

Where it had poised quivering, there was a shallow depression, quickly filling with water. There were also a few coins, dental fillings of gold, keys, and a few handfuls of the priceless gray carbons.

The End

Missionaries from the Sky

STANTON A. COBLENTZ

Illustrated by FRANK R. PAUL



Dr. Rand had established contact with the aliens—And all he had to do to turn earth into their version of Utopia was give them a few simple co-ordinates! A temptation almost beyond an ordinary man's power of resistance . . .

PERHAPS once every fifty or a hundred years, it is given to some brilliant or favored individual to perform some act that will alter the destiny of mankind. Sometimes a statesman, sometimes a general, sometimes a dextrous worker in words, will have the sudden opportunity to shape the future; sometimes it is a scientist that assumes control, and in such a case the change is likely to be startling indeed.

Not more than half a dozen scientists in all history have found themselves in such a world-shaking role. One thinks of James Watt; one thinks of Edison; but at the same time, there are some of whom one emphatically does not think. Among these, I may mention Dr. Ira Rand, possibly the least known of scientific geniuses, yet in some respects the most remarkable of them all.

There are not many persons who know of the discovery made by Rand, and of his phenomenal opportunity. There are not many who are aware of the extraordinary decision which it fell to him to make, and of the rare courage with which he submerged his fame and fortunes. . . .

Had Rand chosen otherwise, his name would rank beside those of Einstein, Marconi and Curie, among the great scientific discoverers of all time. And the earth today would be a vastly different place—but possibly a place less pleasant to inhabit.

Now that Rand has made the unalterable step, it is only fair that the world should learn of his ac-

complishment—and that it should recognize the self-abnegation of the man. He himself is likely to remain mute; hence I, who served as his right-hand assistant, have taken it upon myself to make his story public.

There are, of course, many who know that Dr. Rand—as manager of the laboratories of one of our great radio manufacturers—has given much time to experimentation in methods of wireless transmission. His Prismatic Bifocal Television Lens, His Magnetic Tonal Purifier, His Hetero-Dynamic Radio Amplifier, are only a few of the devices by which he has commended himself to attention. Yet, original as these contrivances are, few persons look upon him as more than a clever technician, or suspect the vastly greater achievements of which he is capable.

It was during a period of confusion in the world of radio that the great opportunity came to Dr. Rand. There are none of us who do not recall how, only two or three years ago, owners of radio sets began to complain of unaccountable disturbances, which in some cases became so severe as to preclude normal reception. Not all wave lengths were affected; but there was a certain area, between 220 and 235 meters, which was continuously subject to attack. The noises, which rarely ceased for more than a few minutes at a time, did not resemble static, nor any form of electrical interference, it was as if a heavy, husky voice were calling from the invisible—a voice that spoke no known language!

So loud as to drown out all except the most powerful stations, the tones throbbed and wavered and vibrated with such living accents, that one would have sworn that some actual being was speaking. Yet there was nothing to support the theory that some unlicensed station was interfering. Not only could no trace of any such station be found, but hearers were unanimous in testifying that the sounds represented no known tongue. Moreover—and this was the most astonishing fact—the disturbances were equally prominent in all parts of the earth. Radio owners in South Africa and Siam joined their brothers in America, Europe and Australia in the chorus of complaints; it seemed as if the very atmosphere of our planet had been affected and as if some new and previously unknown influence were convulsing the ether. But scientists, even while hesitantly advancing this hypothesis, could not reconcile it with the fact that the wave-lengths beneath 220 meters and above 235 remained untroubled.

Simultaneous with this manifestation, a strange although minor annoyance had been observed on television screens. Every now and then, inexplicable shadows would flash across the receiving apparatus; dancing points of light would be seen; wavering forms would appear and vanish, or cloudy apparitions present themselves before the eye. Always these images would be small—in many cases no larger than a silver dime; always they would be blurred and flickering, and would speedily disappear; sometimes they would be shapeless as drifting mist,

sometimes would seem to form fantastic patterns; but in no case did they show more stability than leaping foam, and in no case could their origin be determined.

There was one fact, in particular, that caused much interested speculation. Like the mysterious sounds on the radio, the images were world-wide in their occurrence; they were as prominent in Peking as in New York, as noticeable in Rio de Janeiro as in Melbourne and London. What hitherto undetected influence was agitating the atmosphere of the earth?

Many were the theories that were advanced and rejected; but, for a long time, no observer traced a connection between the unknown television lights and shadows and the enigmatical radio disturbances. It remained for Dr. Rand to identify the two as manifestations of the same phenomenon—and thus to open the way for his master achievement.

In the beginning, Dr. Rand himself did not observe the connection. He was interested chiefly in the aberrations of the television screen—and, from the first, he harbored a theory which bears testimony to the intuitive powers of genius. The nature of that theory long remained a mystery even to me, who spent my days in close contact with Rand; but I was not slow in noting the eagerness that had come into his eyes, the excited haste with which his lean, nervous figure went bustling about the laboratory, the enthusiastic ring in his voice and the absentmindedness that was overcoming him—most of all, the air of

world-excluding preoccupation, with which he would bury himself for hours on end amid a mass of wires, lenses, batteries, electro-magnets, and foul-smelling chemicals.

That he was working at some new invention was evident—but how to guess the purpose of that invention when he persistently refused to answer my questions, or else testily advised me to “mind my own business?” At times, to be sure, I did secure peeps at the apparatus which he was slowly putting together; but the complicated array of wires, mirrors and vacuum tubes told me nothing beyond what I already suspected. With a sigh, I was forced to dismiss the matter, and to decide that Dr. Rand would let me into the secret only when his whim should dictate.

It was long before his whim did dictate. Days went by, weeks went by, months went by, and in my absorption in other matters I had almost come to forget Dr. Rand’s experiment. When now and then the thought of it recurred to me, I would dismiss my doubts with a shrug, concluding that probably the invention had failed. And since I had been called temporarily to another part of the laboratory, where I could not watch Dr. Rand at work, I had no longer any visible reminder of what he was attempting. Hence the eventual announcement found me unprepared.

I still had no inkling of the truth when, greeting me one morning with a dancing light in his eyes, he jovially invited me to his private laboratory. “I have something to show you,

Denison,” he said, in suppressed tones beneath which I seemed to read a veiled eagerness. “Something I want your opinion about.”

As we started away together, he stroked his bristly brown beard thoughtfully, and in his eyes the dancing light gave place to one of shrewd anticipation.

Yet I observed nothing to justify that anticipation when we had reached our destination. Before us, attached to a television receiver, stood a weird-looking device reminding me of an enlarged X-ray machine. I could see that, within a long central tube, there was a series of queerly arranged crystals and lenses; I could see various prisms and mirrors, and I could observe that wires, attached to a wall socket, were running through the whole. But all this gave me little hint as to the nature of the contrivance.

“You behold here a Micro-Crystalline Televisor,” explained Rand, surveying his invention proudly. “The first of its kind ever created.”

“Micro-Crystalline what?” I gasped.

“Micro-Crystalline Televisor. It is designed to enlarge and clarify images beyond the range of the ordinary television receiver.”

“You mean—it is a receiver of exceptional power?”

“It is that—and more than that. You see that there are two screens.” Here he pointed to two wide strips of white cloth, placed at opposite sides of the room. “The first receives an image in the manner of an ordinary television apparatus. The second takes the image reflected from the first, after it has been magnified and

refined by the lenses, much as the leg of a flea or the wing of a gnat will be magnified by a microscope."

"What is the principle behind it?"

Rand smiled, and stroked his beard as if in self-congratulation. "Nothing except a fresh application of laws already well known. Simply the laws of the enlargement and clarification of images by means of lenses, and their transmission to a screen. You see it in operation daily in the motion picture machine. To be sure, in that case the enlargement is made from a film; but I have secured the practical equivalent of a film by means of careful refraction from mirrors and well placed crystals. An image, obtained from the first screen, is transmitted to the second, purged of imperfections and magnified between ninety and a hundred and fifty diameters. Do you wish a demonstration?"

I nodded.

"The peculiar dancing lights and shadows on the television screen were what gave me the idea," continued Rand, as he carefully focused the machine and pressed an invisible button. "It was an inspiration—I am elated to see my theory confirmed."

No sooner had he spoken than he snapped off the electric lights and the room was plunged into darkness. There came a queer whirring sound which told me that the machine was in operation; there came a sizzling series of blue sparks—but that was all. The screen remained blank; and, as I watched in bewilderment, it seemed to me that Rand's experiment had failed.

"You must give it time," boomed the husky voice of the inventor, as though he had read my thoughts. "I am not trying for any ordinary television reception. I want to show you the mysterious lights and shadows. If you will wait a moment, they are certain to appear."

Fortunately, my patience was placed under no strain. Even as the words left Rand's lips, a minute, slowly moving image leapt up on one of the screens, blurred and irregular in outline, and of a mottled gray hue. Being of a kind which I had frequently seen, it caused me no surprise; but what did surprise me—indeed, what startled me so that I gaped like a man gone mad—was the reflection that instantly appeared on the second and larger screen.

Even to this day, when all that happened then is an old and often repeated story, I find it impossible to describe my consternation, my blank and uncomprehending amazement. Certainly, this was the weirdest sight I had ever seen! Or was it the weirdest?—Not less unearthly spectacles were to follow, but none that left me so dazzled, so stupefied, so altogether nonplussed.

Across the ten-foot reaches of the screen, there flickered what I might have taken for a motion picture projected by some fabulous and superhuman operator. It seemed to me that I was gazing upon a forest, rank with a wild and monstrous vegetation; it seemed that snake-like slimy tendrils were threshing and swaying along the ground like gigantic arms seen in delirium, it

seemed that, roofing in these animate and convulsive masses of creepers, were huge mushroom-like plants, whose columns were thick as a man's body, and whose gracefully curving domes stood edge to edge, as though placed in harmony by some master artist.

But these were not what held my attention. Much more startling, much more incredible, was the huge beast-like shape that burst through the thicket, and stood in the center of the screen as though posing for its portrait. Was it really beast? Or was it man? Surely, it seemed as much like the one as like the other! Of gigantic stature—it must have been more than eight feet in height—it came bounding to view in the manner of a kangaroo, leaping with ease and agility upon its enormously developed hind legs. Its forelimbs—three in number—ended in crab-like tentacles which gave it a most repulsive appearance; its coat was of some dark hairless substance reminding me of a close-fitting uniform; its chest was extremely broad and capacious, its abdominal parts narrow and contracted; while what struck me most of all was its huge and unusual head.

This alone it was that gave the creature its human appearance. Preternaturally large in proportion to the size of the body, it was a sagacious oblong in shape, and seemed more than half forehead. The eyes were mere glittering points beneath the hairless brow; the face was flat, and a small round opening showed where the nose should have been; the mouth was almost in-

visible, and there was not even the suggestion of a chin. Yet, despite its atrociously ugly appearance, the face was ruffled with deep lines and furrows that gave the unmistakable impression of intelligence.

For a moment I stared at this outlandish thing with the feeling of one who has seen a ghost. Though never subject to hallucinations, I was willing to believe that this was some delirious vision that would swiftly vanish. But the seconds went by, and it did not fade. The fantastic man—or fantastic beast—continued to gaze at me from the screen as if to inquire, "Well, friend, what do you think of me?" And I continued to return his glance with a sort of stupid speechlessness.

It was the murmured words of Rand that restored my senses. "What do you say, Denison? What do you say now? How do you like my television? Is it a success, do you think?"

"Success?" I blurted out, still unable to collect my thought. "I—I don't quite understand. What—what can it mean? Have we both gone mad, Dr. Rand?"

Heartily the laughter of the inventor rang through the room. "Mad?" he echoed, as if relishing some secret joke. "Mad? No, I don't believe so—though you're likely to see enough to unbalance any man. You think this image extraordinary, do you?"

Again he laughed, though still for some reason that I could not understand.

"Extraordinary is not the word! It is unbelievable!"

"Nothing is unbelievable," he dogmatized, "when you are looking at another planet."

"Another planet?"

"You certainly don't recognize anything on this planet, do you?" he went on, suavely. "You are viewing a typical scene on Mars."

Breathlessly I gaped at him. My heart seemed to stop short; the word Mars came to my lips, trembled there, and died unuttered.

Not waiting for me to recover from my amazement, Rand fluently continued, "The images on the screen only bear out what I suspected long ago. The disturbances in television could not be explained by any earthly influence; therefore I concluded that their source was extra-terrestrial. It was in the hope of messages from outer space that I experimented with my television. For a long time, evidently, Mars has been trying to communicate with us. I have been the first to catch the messages."

"How do you know it is Mars?" I demanded.

Rand smiled as one might smile at a child who has asked some preposterous question. "Because the surface conditions, as I observe them, correspond with those on Mars and on no other known planet. You notice, for example, how large the men are, and how easily they move about. That is because, the planet being smaller, there is less gravitational pull to restrain them——"

"You might also say that of Mercury——and of the moon," I objected.

"So you might—but there is other

evidence. Suppose, however, we do not argue. After you have had a few more peeps, we may be better able to talk."

A few moments passed in silence. The image of the huge, big headed creature fled from the screen; and in its place other images appeared. So startled was I that many of them quite eluded me, and I cannot begin to enumerate them all. I do recall, however, that I had glimpses of sandy plains covered with a scraggly, fungus-like vegetation; of wide, straight waterways bordered with gelatinous weeds; of cloudless heavens in which shone a sun smaller than ours in appearance, and two minute moons; of fields of spiny grasses in which six-legged mice-sized creatures leapt with the agility of grasshoppers; of strange octagonal towers, open at the top, through which sprang queer man-like beings such as I had already seen; and of little flying cars, scarcely bigger than wheelbarrows, by means of which these beings projected themselves high in air, now floating gracefully with the motion of a breeze-blown leaf, now restlessly circling and spiralling like a gyrating fly, now shooting straight upward and descending with a rocket-like precision and speed.

I had no longer any doubts. "Dr. Rand," said I, taking both his hands warmly, while my eyes, I fear, grew dim with emotion, "Let me congratulate you! You have made a miraculous discovery! You have accomplished a scientific——"

Dr. Rand smiled gravely. "Thank you, Denison," he interrupted. "But let us not be premature. Wait till you

have seen all. I am working at a still more remarkable discovery. When that is completed—then, if you wish, you may be enthusiastic.”

Press him as I might, he would not explain what he had in mind. He merely nodded cryptically, and bade me be patient; then abruptly turned aside, and signified that the interview was at an end. But the time was not far off when I was to learn that he had been making no idle boast.

Only a few weeks later, he again called me excitedly into the laboratory. Once more I found myself face to face with the “televisor”; once more I saw the blue sparks flashing, and viewed fantastic images on the screen. But, on this occasion, there were some new instruments present—a microphone and a powerful radio receiver, of the type designed for long-distance reception. “Now I want you not only to watch carefully, but to listen,” prompted Rand, his gray eyes aglitter with an eager light. “See if you do not notice something unusual.”

So speaking, he switched off the current, and the images on the screen vanished. Then carefully he adjusted the radio dial and set the machine into operation; and, at the same time, he renewed his activities with the “televisor.” I was interested to hear once more those strange noises that had puzzled listeners for months; I was interested to note that the “televisor,” operating intermittently, exhibited pictures of bare snow-plains, of hills covered with weird castle-like houses, and of strange octopus-like animals that sidled across the land like living

nightmares. But at first I did not observe the vital fact.

“Well, you see?” inquired Rand, expectantly, after I had followed the exhibition for a moment.

“I see many queer sights——” I started to confess. But the wry expression on his face cut me short; I knew that I had been guilty of a stupid reply.

Hence I continued to watch and listen—soon a striking discovery flashed upon me. The peculiar noises on the radio occurred simultaneously with the images on the screen! When the one ceased, the other ceased: when the one was resumed, the other was resumed! Not once, but a dozen times, this occurred; the appearance and cessation of the two synchronized absolutely! Mere chance could not be the explanation; no series of coincidences could work out so perfectly; the relationship between the radio and the television pictures was demonstrated beyond question!

But what did the relationship imply? So I inquired of Rand, as I turned to him with bewildered exclamations. “Did the radio noises also issue from Mars?”

“Yes, the noises do issue from Mars,” he declared, in matter-of-fact tones, but with a twinkle of undisguised enthusiasm. “They too represent part of the attempt to communicate with us. Both by sight and by sound, the Martians wish to impress us.”

“But how—how did you find it out?” I demanded.

“Merely by accident. One day I happened to have the televisor and the radio in operation at once—and

I would have had to be blind and deaf not to notice the connection. What astonishes me is that no one had discovered it before."

"Perhaps others have discovered it," I suggested. "After all, what good would it do them?"

"What good would it do?" He flung back my words with an angry vehemence; for a second he stood regarding me in surprise and indignation. "What good would it do, my dear man? Do you mean to tell me you don't see? Why, it is the Rosetta Stone of science! It is the key to the most baffling of enigmas! It holds the secret of world-to-world communication!"

Blankly I stood regarding the inventor. "To enter into world-to-world communication, Dr. Rand," I protested, mildly, "one must not only receive messages, but send them——"

"And who says I can't send them?" he flung back, not waiting for me to finish. "For heaven's sake, Denison, what do you think I've been working at all these weeks? After all, the problem is not so difficult. Knowing that the Martians have a powerful transmitting apparatus, it is reasonable to conclude that they have equally powerful receivers. Given sufficient electrical energy, it has long been possible to send messages anywhere on earth: given sufficient increase of power, there is no barrier to flashing our words through the ether even across a distance of many light-years, since the ether, being a conductor of heat and light, would also convey the Hertzian waves——"

"You mean, then, you have suc-

ceeded in connecting with Mars?" I cut him short.

"Exactly. Remember this: at its closest approach to the earth, that planet is but thirty-five or forty million miles away, and even at its farthest is separated from us by little more than two hundred million miles—a mere stone's throw, as astronomical distances go. Now, considering the sensitiveness of the Martian instruments, a power of one thousand kilowatts, which I have applied to the radio and television transmitters——"

"Is sufficient to enable you to say 'How-do-you-do?' to the Martians?" I finished for him.

"More than sufficient. I have already exchanged a few elementary ideas with them—and have found the results quite edifying."

"Doubtless," I commented, not quite certain whether Rand were serious or were but trying to test my credulity. "Of course, you understand the Martian language by intuition——"

"No, but I am taking a course of instruction."

This statement Rand made in the simple and unpretentious manner of one who announces that he is studying French or Spanish.

"By this time, I am an advanced student," he continued, while I smiled skeptically. "When the Martians intercepted the first television images I sent them, and so found that I had caught their messages, they were eager to give me lessons. It is not really difficult. Want to see how it is done?"

"Seeing is believing," said I.

Immediately Rand turned to the

microphone, and bellowed out a long and unintelligible drivel. While I was wondering if excessive experimentation were not driving him mad, he took out his watch, carefully noted the time, and remarked, "It will be a little more than eleven minutes before we can get our reply, for Mars at present is more than sixty million miles away, and the ether waves, making the round trip at the rate of one hundred and eight-six thousand miles a second——"

"Yes, I understand," I interposed. "No doubt I can wait the eleven minutes."

None the less, I had never thought that time could pass so slowly. Conversation lagged; Rand and I alike did nothing but consult our watches; and the watches, as if ruled by some tantalizing demon, persisted in crawling at a worm-like pace. What was I to see when the time had expired? Frankly, I expected nothing at all; yet, as the minutes dragged past, I could not check an eagerness which was gradually taking possession of me.

At last the specified period had elapsed. "Time!" announced Rand, snapping the watch back into his pocket. And, as promptly as though regulated by clockwork, the demonstration commenced.

It was really nothing very spectacular, yet it was as extraordinary a thing as could be imagined. On the screen before me there appeared one of the big-headed, five-limbed creatures that I knew to be a Martian man; and behind him was the same moving, snake-like foliage that I had already seen. Simultaneously, slow

and distinct sounds, like human speech, began to issue from the radio; and I saw that those sounds harmonized with the motions of the man, and that he was acting as would an instructor addressing a class. First he would bend down and tap his knee, while over the radio the word "Molab!" would come to us clearly; then he would touch his thigh, and we would hear, "Darg! Darg!"; then he would indicate his breast, and "Habot! Habot!" would burst upon our ears; then he would refer to various other parts of his anatomy and to the features of his surroundings, proceeding always with a care and deliberation that made his intentions obvious.

"Better take down the words, Denison," advised Dr. Rand. "This is all for your especial benefit. I notified him that a newcomer would be here. Personally, of course, I am already far beyond this stage. I have a vocabulary of more than two thousand Martian words—which, moreover, I can combine into sentences. Besides, I am teaching the Martians English."

While this announcement left me stricken speechless, and while the demonstration on the screen still continued, Rand delved into a drawer, and drew forth a note-book lettered with crazy-looking hieroglyphics. "I have the Martian words noted down here," he informed me. "Also, I have a record of everything the Martians have said to me, and of all that I have said to them. Already I have gathered information enough to take the world by storm."

"God in heaven! Why not do so?" I exclaimed.

"I shall. I surely shall—in time. But I do not want to be premature. When I have my story complete, the effect will be much more shattering. Meanwhile, would you like me to read you some of the results?"

To this question, of course, there could be but one answer. After Rand had switched off the "televisor" and the radio, I sat down to listen to his reports.

"The Martians appear to be a curious people," he assured me, by way of preliminary. "They do not seem to look at things as we do. Of course, there are gaps in my knowledge of their speech, which I had to fill in by guesswork. But here is what they seem to think of us."

And slowly he read, "Our earthly brothers, inhabitants of a younger and weaker world, it is with great joy that we greet you across space. For thousands of years we have known that your planet was populated, but we have long debated whether it was populated by intelligent beings. The accepted opinion was in the negative; none the less, from time to time throughout the ages we have attempted to send you messages. But they were never acknowledged until now, leading us to conclude that you knew nothing even of so primitive a device as wireless. To the argument that this proved you mere crawling beasts there was apparently no answer. Of course, it was argued that you were but an infant race, having at most a few hundred thousand or a few million years behind you; our ancestors were turning out works of wisdom, when yours were fishes squirming in the salt waves. Even so, we were disap-

pointed at your lack of progress. But now that we have learned that you are on the threshold of civilization, we are delighted to exchange ideas with you, and to offer that aid to be expected of elder brothers."

Rand paused, and looked at me with a quizzical smile. "Rather interesting, don't you think?" he inquired.

"Rather presumptuous, I should say. The Martians seem to look down on us from an almighty distance. But how did you succeed in getting so complete a message?"

The inventor regarded me thoughtfully, and slowly replied, "Interspersed with the Martian, there were some English words, which our friends up there were remarkably quick about picking up. For the rest, facial expressions, gestures, charts and pictures aided me to understand. Of course, it has taken months of preparation. . . . Do you want to hear more?"

I grunted in the affirmative.

Rand turned the pages of the notebook with a doubtful expression. "Now here is something curious," he stated at length. "A while back, I sent them a television image of myself, but did not mention who or what it was. Their response is refreshing. Just observe what they think of me."

"Our earthly brothers, we were amazed at the picture of the strange two-legged animal. How unspeakably ugly! Is it a domestic beast? It looks harmless but stupid. What is the peculiar pointed swelling in the middle of the face just below the eyes? And what the mat of hair at the bottom of the face? Even

our domestic animals have had no hair for thirty million years. A committee of scientists, called in to observe the exhibit, believe that it represents some primeval form which should have been wiped out ages ago——”

Rand ended in mid-sentence; my laughter cut him short. “Perhaps the remarks are justified!” he declared, joining me in hearty merriment. “Well, these are the least ludicrous reports I could read you. You had better wait a while before hearing any more. I am about to send the Martians an account of our ways of living, accompanied, when possible, by television pictures.”

My curiosity being whetted, I attempted to coax further information from Rand. I urged him to read me more of the Martian communications; I pleaded with him to give the results of his inquiries immediately to the world; I entreated him to take me deeper into his confidence, so that we might conduct immediate inquiries in partnership. But to all my appeals he turned a deaf ear. Never had I met a man more doggedly bent on following his own way! Not only did he pledge me to secrecy, but he was determined to reveal nothing more to me for the present, and to keep his results from the world until his findings were complete. And I, while feeling unbounded admiration for the genius of the man, was disturbed in unaccountable ways by his secretiveness, as though I had some indefinable intimation of evil to come. . .

From time to time, during the weeks that followed, I attempted to

wrest from Rand some word as to the progress of his experiments. But though I encountered him daily, there was little information I could obtain. He would answer my inquiries by asserting that everything was “going splendidly” or that he had just “received a new message,” but he would not enter into details; and all the while he was obviously preoccupied, and was changing in ways that alarmed his other associates no less than myself. Habitually he was coming to wear a far-away, abstracted expression, as of one who dwells in some other universe; he was growing absentminded, and would be as likely as not to forget whether or not he had adjusted his cravat or eaten his breakfast; he would pass us sometimes without a nod, not because he wished to be rude, but because he actually failed to see us; he was becoming emaciated and thin, and his eyes were aglow with a frenzied, almost fanatical fire, while now and then he was heard muttering to himself, as if in secret ecstasy or dread.

It was three months before he again called me into his laboratory, and signified that he had a revelation to make. His face on this occasion looked strained and worn, as in the case of one who has endured some intolerable worry; his cheeks were almost cadaverous in their pallor, but in his eyes there was the brilliant flame that had been there so often of late. “Well, Denison,” he exclaimed, as he sank wearily into a chair beside the “televisor,” “I don’t know how much longer I can keep going. My researches have been eating away at me like a disease. It is

time that I take someone into my confidence. The burden is too much for me to bear alone."

"What burden?" I demanded.

He looked at me wistfully, and shook his head slowly, as if but half decided on his course. "I do not know, Denison," he ruminated, "if it is fair to make you share the responsibility. The weight of the whole world rests upon my head. I have it in my power, if I will, to change the course of history."

Wonderingly I stared at him. Was not the explanation that the man had gone mad?

"Queer things have happened since I spoke to you before," he stated. "I have received startling messages. A momentous decision lies in my hands. A final message, which I expect this afternoon, may determine my choice."

"You speak in enigmas," said I.

"Events make me speak in enigmas. But the greatest enigma is that which lies unsolved before me. Oh, God, that I may have the wisdom to decide rightly!"

Abruptly he arose, and, clenching his fists, went pacing about the room in the manner of one distracted.

But after a moment, he resumed his seat. Becoming more settled he confided, "The messages I have received of late, Denison, place me in a fearful dilemma. You must not mind my actions; they are merely my efforts to retain a grip on my sanity. Sometimes I wonder whether I have not been dreaming . . . Let me read you some recent messages."

He fumbled for his note-book, which displayed scores upon scores of pages packed with hieroglyphics.

Momentarily he hesitated; then mumbled, "Here is something typical," and began to read:

"Our earthly brothers, we cannot decide whether what you tell us is serious or in jest. But it must be in jest. You say that your world is divided into many nations—have you not learned to uproot narrowness? You say that, within those nations, some persons have wealth to squander while others starve—can it be that justice is unknown in your land? Worst of all, you declare that the nations permit wars in which hundreds of thousands or even millions of citizens are slaughtered—is it then that your planet is a madhouse? No, our earthly brothers, we will not believe so. You must be jesting. On our world, no nations have existed since our emergence from barbarism tens of millions of years ago. In all that time no Martian, except an occasional victim of mental disease, has lifted his arm against another Martian. It must be so with you too, our earthly brothers, for are you not also civilized?"

Rand paused, and looked up with a grim smile. "That is only one message out of many," he declared.

"Well, what of it?" said I. "The Martian views may be a little peculiar, but that is no reason to let your hair turn gray."

"Not in the least. But you do not understand," he continued, while his thin fingers nervously toyed with his untrimmed beard. "We have created a consternation on Mars. When the people there found that I was not jesting, but that we really do have nations and warfare, they ex-

pressed their pity and dismay. They concluded that we were savages in need of intelligent guidance, and started a movement to remake the earth. They have the spirit of the true reformer, I believe, for they want to model our world on the plan of theirs."

"Well why not let them try?" I suggested with the attempt at a laugh. "At their distance, they are not likely to prove dangerous!"

"Yes, but they can overcome the distance!"

Suddenly Rand's manner became alert, decisive, fiery, and it was with a startling energy that he proceeded. "They can overcome the distance! They are a million years in advance of us scientifically! They can cross the void to the earth! They have actually flown through space to certain of the asteroids, millions of miles away! If we will let them, they will come to the earth! It is all for me to decide, for me to decide!"

Filled with the vehemence of this announcement, Rand again shot to his feet. His whole frame was quivering; his movements were abrupt and violent as he once more began to pace the floor.

"Calm yourself, Dr. Rand." I urged, springing to his side and taking his arm. "Calm yourself. Tell me, just what is for you to decide?"

"For me to decide whether the Martians will come here!" he burst forth flinging himself free of my arm. "For me to decide whether they will come as missionaries! Whether they will give us their ways of thought, of living, their civilization. The Martians want to convert the earth! It is all for me to decide!"

Disregarding my entreaties, he continued to storm back and forth like a man out of his wits.

At first, of course, I did not take him seriously. In spite of the earnest, glittering fire in his eyes, the obvious explanation was that the poor man had taken leave of his senses. Hence I did my best to humor him, to console him, and to pretend to give credence to his erratic notions.

"The fact is," he went on to explain, when finally he had been somewhat sobered, "that the Martians would completely transform life here. Being in command of unlimited mechanical power, they would control us as we control the cattle of the fields. They would take up the reins of government in all lands; they would make the laws; they would batter down social distinctions; they would redistribute wealth, level away inequalities, prohibit warfare, and abolish national differences."

"In other words," said I, still not taking Rand seriously, "They would convert our world into a Utopia!"

"Yes, but into a Utopia without freedom. We would no longer fight, cheat, bicker, and destroy—but we could no longer go our own way! We would have to act as the Martians saw fit! Would we be better off? Would we be better off? I keep asking myself. Would the gain equal the loss?"

"My dear Dr. Rand," I protested, observing how the inventor, frenziedly raking his hair, was still pacing the floor, "I feel sure that you exaggerate. How can the Martians do all these things? Certainly, you

are making a mountain out of an anthill!"

Rand turned to me with contempt staring plainly from his eyes. "It is evident that you do not understand," he exclaimed. "Well, then, perhaps you will see for yourself! The time has come for more television messages! Your own eyes will inform you!"

Hastily he turned to the "televisor," and after a moment the sputtering blue sparks began to appear, and images flashed once more upon the screen. Multitudes of the huge, five-limbed Martians darted before us, their noseless faces hideous as goblins. Some were clothing themselves in queer balloon-like suits ten times their own size; others were wielding long syringe-like tubes from which foggy vapors issued in spurts; still other were flying through the air in their odd little cars, or else springing along the ground in frog-like leaps. Truly, they made an impressive, a frightening assemblage; they struck me as things horrible, inimical; I was alarmed, though I knew that they were sixty million miles away; I shuddered as at the vision of a ravaging army.

"See them getting ready to invade the earth!" exclaimed Rand, in wild eagerness. "Those balloon-like devices are vacuum garments with which they may counteract the Martian gravitation and reach the earth. Look how they are all ready to set out! Notice those syringe-like machines! They will discharge gases to paralyze our will-power and make us unable to resist! The expedition is all ready! The missionaries will come, will come—if only I give the word!"

"Why must you give the word?" I gasped. But just at that moment the radio, bursting into action, uttered a deep-pitched series of Martian phrases. And Rand turned to his note-book, and began to scribble with frantic haste.

Even as he took down the words, he translated them in excited tones for my benefit.

"Our earthly brothers, the expedition is ready! We will go to you in your need, and elevate you to Martian standards! We will wipe out all earth-made laws, and replace them by Martian codes; we will rule you for your own good. At last, our earthly brothers, you will rise above the barbarism that has engulfed you!"

"But before we can come to your aid, we need some assistance from you. We must know the exact chemical composition and density of your atmosphere, so that we may adjust ourselves to it; we must be directed to some flat and open stretch of land, so that we may not fall into the sea or be lost among the high mountains. Tell us these things, O, our earthly friends, and twenty thousand missionaries shall set out this very day!"

The message stopped short. Rand, flinging down his pencil, sat moping his hair in the manner of one gone mad. "Shall I tell them?" he kept repeating. "Shall I tell them? The temptation is so strong! They will come here, and will create a different world! There will be no more wars! No more social inequality! All will have plenty, all will tolerate their neighbors! But we will no longer be free then! Oh, shall I tell them?"

"Calm your self, Dr. Rand!" I cried

for the twentieth time, coming over to him and taking his arm. "Calm yourself! There is no reason for such agitation——"

Suddenly he seemed to get beyond control. "There is more than reason! I—I cannot take the chance! Let me—let me put the temptation away! Let me put it beyond me!"

As he uttered these words, he seized his note-book, and violently ripped it from cover to cover; then, with maniacal fury, tore it into scraps, and set a match to the ruins.

"Dr. Rand! Dr. Rand!" I yelled, darting forward and striving to deter him. "Dr. Rand, what are you doing? All your notes! All the messages from Mars! All——"

He did not seem to hear me. Like one filled with a lust of destruction, he was bent upon a still more disastrous work. Seizing a heavy steel rod from the laboratory table, he rushed like a madman toward the "televisor," and began to deal blow after heavy blow upon the delicate apparatus. Crash followed crash in bewildering succession; shattered glass and twisted steel fell in a rain of ruins to the floor; while I, standing helplessly by, cried out in horror and dismay, "Dr. Rand! Dr. Rand! Your invention! Your great invention! You are wrecking you invention! Stop, stop, Dr. Rand! Stop! Stop!"

But he would not stop. Still, with insensate frenzy, he beat and beat at the ruins until soon nothing remained but a mass of splintered lenses and battered tubes and wires.

Then, all at once, every atom of energy seemed to leave his body. He sank wearily into a seat; the

distracted look on his face gave way to one of utter listlessness; he sighed, and his voice was blank with despair as he moaned. "It is done, done, done! I had to do it! My invention—ruined, ruined! It will never be given to the world! I had to do it! The Martians would have come and ruled us! Who was I to let the world be overturned? Better to destroy my invention! We will never speak again with the Martians! Never! Never!"

For a long while Rand sat moping by himself, uttering hardly a word, scarcely seeming to hear my distressed inquiries. But when at length he did arise, it was with a new calmness in his eyes, despite the pallor of his cheeks. His lips were firmly compressed; he bore the look of one who has safely mastered a storm; I could see that my fears for his sanity had been needless.

"Denison," he said, putting his hand gently on my shoulder, "let us forget what has happened. It had to be—I feel that we have avoided a great danger . . . What do you say to dining at the club tonight?"

As I accepted the invitation, and as, with shaking fingers, I took the cigarette he offered me, I had the feeling that he had performed a greater deed in destroying his invention than in creating it. Yet that mass of torn metal and broken glass, lying twisted and ghastly upon the floor, seemed to stare at me like a silent reproach, and I groaned inwardly to think that Rand's prodigious achievement should have perished before the world had had a chance to marvel and applaud.

The End

A PORTFOLIO:
THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON by H. G. Wells
Illustrated by FRANK R. PAUL



FIRST MEN IN THE MOON

